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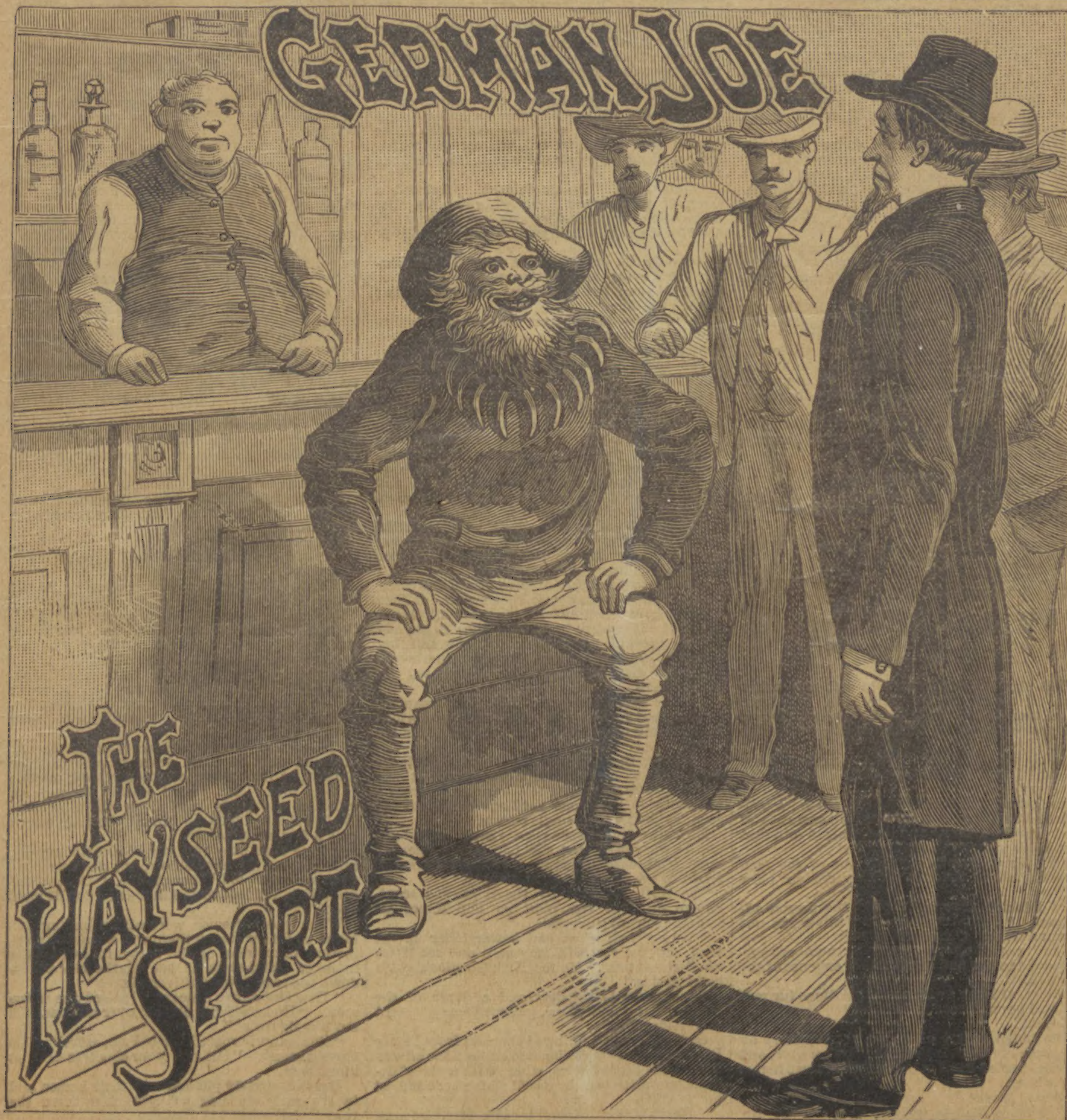
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"JOSEPH SCHLEYER—GERMAN JOE, FOR SHORT."

BOYNTON

German Joe, THE HAYSEED SPORT,

OR,

The Twin Racket at Placer Ranch.

BY HOWARD M. BOYNTON,
AUTHOR OF "CADET DETECTIVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A WANDERING MINSTREL.

"LOOK oudt, yo' son-uf-a-gun; don't yo' see dodt horse? Maype yo' own t'is roat, ain't it?"

The speaker regained his feet and flashed a dark-lantern in the face of the man who had just collided with him.

"Uf yo' vant der hull roat, v'y'n t'under don't yo' take id in de daytime und not prow around ad dis time uf night?"

"Who in blazes are you?" growled the other, trying to dodge the blinding glare of the lantern, "and what do you want here?"

"I don't vant nothin' uf you; budt v'en some vild Indian tries to climb ofer me in de dark, unter de impression dat I ain't vurth noticin', he ish likely to gedt left, ain't id?"

"All right, Dutchy," responded the man. "I didn't mean to run into you, and I guess you didn't try to telescope me, so we're square. I've got my arms full or I'd shake. So-long!"

"Dutchy" remounted his horse and continued his journey along the narrow road that led from Placer Ranch down through Horse-shoe Valley to Silverside. He had left the latter village late in the evening, and had not expected to encounter any one on the lonely road.

About half a mile from Placer Ranch he had collided with a mounted horseman, whom he recognized as one of the leading citizens of the town toward which he was traveling.

But what surprised him most, was that the man carried in his arms the unconscious form of a beautiful young lady. "Dutchy" had lived long enough in that section of the country to understand the meaning of the axiom, "Mind your own business," and he concluded to say nothing about his adventure in Placer Ranch.

And so he journeyed leisurely on in the darkness, occasionally roaring out some favorite German song:

"Dere vhas a flyin' Dutchman,
Who sailed ofer der sea;
He robbed der beoples on der ships—
Look oudt fur me

"He stole enough to puy a house,
In goot oldt German-ee,
And dere he lived his vicked life—
Look oudt fur me!

"Unt v'en he tied he left a son,
A vicked poy vhas he;
He kills der beoples like his pa—
Look oudt—dot's me!"

This simple ditty seemed to suit him better than all others, for he sang it a half-dozen times, and might still have been singing it had not the lights of Placer Ranch greeted his eyes.

"Voll, ve vhas in der town, unt now led's see uf der flyin' Dutchman kin findt a place to lay his verry headt."

He fastened his horse, with the aid of a padlock and chain, to a tree near the entrance of the "Golden Garter," and then walked into that hospitable place for a glass of beer.

"Hi, dere, Dutchy!" yelled one of the men standing about the bar. "How did ye' blow in?"

"I didt nod plow in," replied the person addressed. "I shust come in from Silverside unt I vant a trink. Come oop, poys."

The "poys," about twenty in number, surrounded the bar and drank at the expense of the German.

"Now, uf I can gedt accommodations fur myself und horse, I reckon I vhas—"

Crack!

The sharp report of a rifle, accompanied by the crash of glass, interrupted the speaker, and a bullet buried itself in the bar within two inches of his head.

Crack! crack!

Two more bullets whizzed through the air,

and this time the "Flying Dutchman" fell heavily to the floor.

The inmates of the saloon, although accustomed to all phases of border life, were thrown into great excitement over this deliberate attempt at murdering the new-comer. A dozen men with drawn revolvers sprung out of the door, and another dozen rushed to the broken window from which the shots had come.

Little Pete, the proprietor of the place, came from behind the bar and knelt by the side of the fallen man, who slowly opened his eyes and glanced about the room.

"Whar'd ther bullet strike ye?" inquired Pete.

"I vhas not shot ad all," replied the Dutchman. "I ontly fell town so as to make pelief I vhas hurdt, ain't id?"

"Do you know who fired the shots?" asked Pete. "It ain't often a man is fired at like that fur nothin'."

"I don't know," said the other, rising to his feet. "No von would gain anything by shootin' me."

"What's yo'r name?"

"Joseph Schlerger—German Joe fur short. I shust come from Silverside, unt I haf no enemies as I knows uf."

Pete returned to his place behind the bar, and presently the men who had left the room at the first discharge came back and reported that they had discovered no trace of the would-be murderer.

German Joe again invited the "poys" up to the bar, and while they were drinking to his future good health and prosperity, the door opened and a well-dressed, aristocratic-looking man of about fifty years of age hurried into the room.

"Quick, Pete!" he exclaimed. "Get out a dozen of your fastest horses. My daughter has been stolen, and unless we can get the trail of the villains now, we may not be able to do so at all."

Not only the proprietor of the "Golden Garter," but every man within the sound of the speaker's voice put down his glass and sprung toward the door.

Pete unlocked the entrance to the hotel stables, and in a few moments a score of excited men were galloping rapidly toward Silverside.

The name of the man who had just aroused the citizens of Placer Ranch to such a marked degree, was Colonel Harris Denmore.

He and his invalid wife and only daughter had started nearly a year before from Denver to take a trip in a pair of prairie schooners across the elevated plains of Colorado for his wife's health. They had stopped at Placer Ranch on account of its unusually healthful climate, and at the time of which we write, Mrs. Denmore was very much improved in health.

The daughter, Grace, was a very beautiful young lady of about seventeen, and during her stay in Placer Ranch, had made friends with nearly all of its rough residents.

One of the buckskin desperadoes of the place, a rather good-looking man by the name of Nick Goodloe, had fallen violently in love with Grace, and had attempted for a long time to pay her his disagreeable attentions; but she and her father objected to this, and for some time before the girl's disappearance Nick had ceased his persecutions.

All this Colonel Denmore told his companions as they sped rapidly toward his residence, which was situated nearly a quarter of a mile from the town.

Arriving there, search was at once made for some clue to begin their work upon. It was discovered that the girl had been taken from a hammock in the front yard and carried to the road, evidently by a single person.

No signs of violence were visible anywhere, and it was clear that she had either been too much frightened to struggle or had swooned of fright in the grasp of her kidnapper.

The trail, followed by the lynx-eyed scout, known all over the West as Kid Keen, led straight toward Silverside.

"I guess half of us had better foller up the trail and the rest will stay here and see if we kin find anythin'. Mebbe Nick Goodloe's got 'r hand in this."

Thus spoke Little Pete, and a dozen of the party, led by Kid Keen, galloped away toward Silverside.

German Joe had followed the men from Placer Ranch and was just about to explain his adventure of the night before, when, with a cry of delight, one of the searchers held aloft a keen-bladed bowie-knife.

"Here's suthin' I found by this tree," he said,

excitedly. "It's got some one's name on it—J-o-s-e-p-h, Joseph, S-c-h-l-e-r-g-e-r. That's ther Dutchman there."

A half-dozen hands were laid on the Dutchman, and Little Pete drew a dangerous-looking revolver from his belt.

"See here, Dutchy, what do you know about this? Speak out—quick."

Joe was too much surprised for a moment to open his mouth.

"Id vhas nod zo," he gasped, at length. "I don't know noddings aboutt dod gurl. I nefer—"

"What's the trouble, boys?" inquired a new-comer, interrupting the speaker, who recognized in him the man he had met on the Silver-side road the night before. "Is this a hangin'-party?"

"No, it ain't, Nick Goodloe," replied Little Pete. "But it's likely to be before long. Whar've yo' been?"

"None of yo'r business," retorted the other. "Mebbe yo've got a right to know whar I've been but I kal'klate yo' ain't—not to-night."

Pete glared angrily at Nick, but that individual was not to be disconcerted.

"Waal, ef yo' don't want'r tell whar yo' wuz, mebbe we kin make yo' tell," said the former, motioning to the men.

Nick sprung back, drawing a revolver in each hand.

"I don't know what you fellers air drivin' at, but it'll cost yo' sunthin' to fool with me," he cried. "What'n thunder is all this about?"

His apparent ignorance disarmed Little Pete of suspicion and he said, more pleasantly than before:

"Ef yo' don't know what's happened, it's time we told you. Grace Denmore has been kidnaped, an' we know you took her!"

Pete threw out this bluff with a coolness that surprised his hearers, Nick most of all.

"Well, ef that don't beat all I ever see! It wuz only last night thet I met this Dutchman here a-carryin' Miss Grace out to'ards Silverside, an' when I interferred he shot my horse from under me an' escaped. I wuz just comin' here to tell the kernal."

The crowd of men gathered about German Joe and regarded him ominously.

"Dutchy," said Little Pete, tightening his grip on the prisoner. "Lead us to thet gurl!"

Joe was looking straight into the polished barrel of Pete's six-shooter and he knew that there was a dangerous man behind it, but he never flinched.

"I don't know noddings aboutt dot gurl!" he protested. "I nefer see her in my life. Laad night I medt dis man on ter roat to Silverside mit a pooty young gurl in his arms, but I nefer thought as he vhas a-stealin' her."

"And where did this knife come from then?" queried one of the men. "It's got yo'r name on ther handle."

Joe shook his head.

"I nefer see dot knife pefore. I don't carry dose t'ings."

"Mebbe yo' don't, but I reckon we'll hold yo' till ther boys come back," said Little Pete.

The men remounted, and, accompanied by Colonel Denmore, whose broadcloth contrasted strangely with the motley garments of his companions, started back to Placer Ranch.

During the trip, Joe did a great deal of thinking, and it did not take him very long to reach the conclusion that his absence would be preferable to his presence in that locality for the next few days.

He saw that circumstances were dead against him and that he could scarcely hope to clear himself, at least while a prisoner, with no one to help him. This passed quickly through his mind as the party sped along the Horseshoe Valley Road, which he himself had traversed only a few hours before.

"T're vhas only von vay of clearin' myself, und dot vas to escape now, unt den find oudt v're the girl is hid," thought Joe. "Dodt scoundrel, Nick, vill ledt them kill me uf I don't light oudt."

When the horsemen were within hailing distance of Placer Ranch there was a sudden commotion in the rear of the party, followed by a score of pistol-shots as one of the riders flew down the road toward Silverside.

"Ther Dutchman's escaped," yelled one of the men. "He keeled Bill Taylor over and sneaked out like lightnin'."

"Chase him!" roared Little Pete, wheeling his horse around. "Git out your shooters and let him hev it."

The entire party put spurs to their horses and in the early morning twilight, flew down the road in full pursuit of German Joe.

CHAPTER II.

THE BADGERS' NEST.

GRACE DENMORE sat in her hammock under the shade of a spreading oak, swinging gently back and forth. She had laid down her book and was thinking of her home in the East, and wondering how long it would be before she could return to her friends.

"Mamma's much better now, and I wouldn't be surprised if we started East in a few weeks. I'm sure I've had enough of Colorado and—"

Her thoughts were violently disturbed by the sudden appearance of two men, one of whom rushed upon her without ceremony and threw a heavy dark blanket over her head and shoulders.

She tried to scream but the sound of her voice was deadened by the folds of the robe, and in another instant, in spite of her struggles, she was being carried quickly toward the road. The excitement and rough treatment were too much for her, and by the time her captors had reached their horses she had fainted.

Nick Goodloe, for he the kidnapper was, took leave of his accomplice, and with his fair burden in his arms, mounted one of the horses and set out for Silverside at a rapid gait.

Silverside was, at the time of which we write, a smaller town than Placer Ranch, but was noted throughout the country as a resort for roughs and toughs of the worst class. It was, in fact, merely a collection of gambling-houses, saloons and concert halls.

One of the largest of these, called the "Badgers' Nest," had a reputation that made it famous all over the West, and was not infrequently heard of in the "States."

It was kept by a man named Dacy, who was himself known as a "bad man," and had set the corner-stone of the village cemetery by shooting the first person who had dared to intimate that he wasn't the biggest man in Junita county.

To this place, Nick Goodloe took the unconscious Grace Denmore. The proprietor had evidently been expecting the arrival, for a suite of rooms on the top floor had been prepared for the girl's reception.

"Take good keer uv her, Phil," said Nick to Dacy, as he delivered Grace into the latter's keeping. "Ef anythin' happens to thet gurl, remember you'll hev to account to me."

"She's ez safe here ez she would be at hum," replied Dacy. "I'll see thet she's treated like a princess, an' ef any one goes foolin' aroun' her—well, yo' know me!"

Nick smiled at this significant remark, and, remounting his horse, rode slowly back toward Placer Ranch. When he reached the residence of Colonel Denmore, he heard the excited talk of the party which that gentleman had organized to go in search of his daughter, and thinking that it would be best to put a bold face on the matter, he deliberately rode up to them, inquiring the reason of the unusual commotion.

The result of his appearance has already been recorded. His story of meeting German Joe during the night had removed suspicion from himself and fastened it more firmly upon the Dutchman. When he was told of the discovery of the knife bearing Joe's name, he was very much puzzled, but concluded that his partner must have dropped it.

Nick accompanied the party on the return to Placer Ranch, and when Joe made his escape he was one of the first to join the pursuit.

"Wa-al, boys," said Little Pete, when, two hours later, they drew rein in Silverside. "We've tracked thet Dutchman here, but whar'n thunder is he hid? Let's begin by searchin' ole Dacy's Nest."

"Good idee," assented several. "Ef he's got too much uv a crowd here there mought be a fight, howsomever."

"He won't fight over thet Dutchman," returned Little Pete, dismounting. "An' ef he does, I reckon we kin jest about raise him out'n his hand."

The rest dismounted, and were immediately joined by the party under the leadership of Kid Keen, which had left Colonel Denmore's house to trace the trail of the kidnappers.

"We follered it clear to within a hundred yards uv thet tree by Cody's cattle-trail," said Keen. "An' then we lost it dead. Seems mighty queer."

Little Pete hastily recounted the escape of German Joe, and told him that the Dutchman was evidently in hiding somewhere in Silverside.

"We ar' goin' to begin by turnin' old Dacy inside out," said Pete, to whom the task was by no means unpleasant. "Git yo'r boys ready, for more'n likely he'll show fight."

Dacy, on the inside of the "Badger's Nest," regarded the warlike preparations with astonishment and dismay.

"What'n thunder are them fellers arter?" he growled to himself. "It must be they're here fur thet gurl, but by the eternal, they're hain't enough men in Colarady to take her. I jest about kalk'late to keep my paws on thet woman and let Nick Goodloe go some'ar's else fur his wife. Mebbe I'm an ole— There they air, poundin' on the door."

Dacy went to the door and inquired:

"What'n blazes do yo' want here afore a man's up? The Nest hain't open yet."

"We want some one yo've got hid in yere," replied Little Pete. "An' we come prepared to git what we want. See?"

Dacy thought he saw, but he didn't. The demand for some one whom he was keeping hid was thought by him to refer to Grace Denmore, and he acted accordingly. Without replying to Little Pete, he rushed up-stairs, woke up the couple of dozen men who were regular lodgers at the "Badgers' Nest," and while they were dressing, he barricaded all the doors and windows in the house.

Little Pete on the outside noted these preparations, and was immensely pleased.

"He's got thet boy, sure, and won't giv' him up. Probably Dutchy hez paid him well ter keep him safe, an' ole Dacy reckons we won't try to keep him by force. Waal, mebbey not."

Little Pete and his followers, numbering now about thirty men, tied their horses out of pistol-shot, and then cautiously returned to the "Nest."

Nick Goodloe had up to this time followed the leadership of Little Pete, but when he heard of the scheme to search Dacy's house, he openly rebelled.

"What's ther use uv havin' some uv ther boys shot fer nothin'?" he argued. "Dacy'll kill a dozen of yees afore yo' git through, an—"

"Oh, shet up," cried Pete. "Don't yo' see he's got thet Dutchman or he wouldn't mind our goin' inside. Ef we git him we kin make him show us whar he's hid the gurl."

This logic failed to satisfy Nick, at ne was forced to enter the raid or show the white feather, and so he fell in line, cursing the luck that led the party to the very hiding-place of the girl.

Little Pete first had the house surrounded, and then, with a dozen of the party's best, made ready for an assault on the front entrance.

Kid Keen and five others were stationed about fifty yards in front of the house with loaded rifles covering every window.

"Ef a head appears anywhar put a bullet in it," were Pete's terse instructions, and his followers were prepared to carry them out to the letter.

Thus, protected from the shots of their enemies, Little Pete led a furious onslaught on the front door. A long, blunt log was used as a battering-ram, but before much effective work was done, the bullets were flying back and forth between Keen's men and the front windows, and Pete was obliged to hasten to his lieutenant's aid.

The windows of the house fairly blazed with rifle-flashes, for Dacy had rallied all his men to his assistance, and was prepared to lay out all Junita county if necessary.

The long-standing rivalry between Placer Ranch and Silverside had been brought to a climax, and must now result in victory for one of the contending factions.

Before a half-hour of this kind of fighting was passed, Little Pete saw clearly that his party was getting the worst of it, and finally withdrew all his men out of range for a consultation.

Nick Goodloe was dispatched back to Placer Ranch for reinforcements, a committee was appointed to care for the wounded, and the attack promptly renewed. Two men were already killed outright, and the blood of Placer Ranch came to the front.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

The sound of exploding shells echoed like fire-crackers within the walls of the "Nest," as with a steady hand Dacy kept the fire trained upon the skirmishing line of the enemy.

The third person to be carried from the field was Little Pete, and as he was laid by the side of the other two, his friends shut their teeth hard and gripped their hot weapons with a determination to die if it was necessary in the defense of the honor and dignity of Placer Ranch.

Kid Keen, with something of the quick intuition that characterizes all great generals, saw plainly that this kind of fighting would never

bring about the desired end. To win a victory out of the seeming defeat that now confronted him, he must force an entrance into the house—and without delay.

To this end he reformed the line of battle, sending half of the party to cover the front windows while he led the other half in an attack on the door.

By the very liberal use of the battering-ram the door was forced from its hinges and finally fell with a crash on the inside.

"Forward," yelled Keen, springing into the building at the head of the Placer Ranch contingent. "Now we'll give the rascals a taste of their own medicine."

The entrance was effected into the main room of the "Nest" occupying the entire first floor. In one corner a broad stairway led to the sleeping rooms overhead.

Keen rushed for this stairway, but half-way up they were met by a sharp fire from the open door at the top, and sent headlong back again.

"Charge!" shouted Keen, almost frenzied by the repulse, and leaving their dead and dying behind them, the brave little party sprang straight toward the muzzles of their enemies' rifles, gleaming through the doorway.

CHAPTER III.

GERMAN JOE ON DECK.

WHEN Joe put spurs to his horse and escaped from Little Pete just as his party was entering Placer Ranch, he had already prepared a plan of action for clearing himself of the unpleasant charge. He knew but could not prove that Nick Goodloe was the real kidnapper and his reason for taking so direct a route to Silverside was to keep as far as possible in Nick's tracks.

For a few minutes after his flight the bullets whistled unpleasantly close to his ears, but by the time he had again reached Colonel Denmore's residence he had left his pursuers far in the rear. To escape a possible meeting with Kid Keen and his followers, Joe left the main road when near Silverside and took a cattle-trail running south to Cody's ranch and from there to the village.

This trail he followed into Silverside and finding no evidence of the Placer Ranch party there, he entered the "Badger's Nest" for a few moments' rest. The bar-room was deserted and after searching about for the proprietor of the place Joe started up-stairs.

To his surprise no one was on the landing to intercept him and so he kept on, passing into the hall above.

"Wa-al, t'is vhas a queer place, ain't id?" he muttered. "No von aroundt to wait on customers. Hello, vhas is dis?"

He picked up a dainty little handkerchief from the floor, and glanced at the name in the corner.

"Shimmany, budt dis takes der cake! Dis vhas der name uf der gurl dott vhas stolen. She musdt be kept hid here some'ars."

Before Joe could continue his investigations a door down at the other end of the hall opened, and a man rushed out. At the same time a party of horsemen came galloping up to the front door.

Joe shrunk back against the side of the hall as Dacy ran down-stairs and bolted the door.

"Vell, dis vhas a funny scrape. Dose peobles from Placer Ranch are oudt in front lookin' fur me, unt dott man t'inks they'r arter der gurl."

Thus mused Joe as he retreated into a small room, the door of which stood conveniently open. Here he stayed during the entire battle. The sharp reports of the rifles, the crashing in of the door and the hoarse orders of Dacy could all be distinctly heard, and when the charge was made on the stairway, and the Placer Ranch men repulsed, Joe could hold in no longer.

He grasped a revolver in each hand, and just as Kid Keen and his followers made their second onslaught, the little Dutchman opened fire on the enemy's rear.

Attacked on both sides by a running fire of small-arms, Dacy became completely paralyzed and precipitately retreated. Kid Keen, flushed and triumphant, came running in, followed by his brave little band, just in time to see German Joe, standing with his back to the wall, keeping at bay a score of maddened men.

"I vhas der Flyin' Dutchman, and der fu'st man dott raises a shooter, vill gedt hurt, don't id."

"That's right, Dutchy," cried Keen. "Keep them there till we git loaded up."

This bit of facetiousness was lost on Dacy's men, who losing all control of themselves, made a rush for Joe.

Crack! Crack-k-k-k!

A flame of fire leaped from each pistol-barrel, and the crowd cowered back again. Keen had by this time taken in the situation, and his men ranged themselves alongside of the Dutchman.

"Now then, Dacy, we've got what we come for, an' with yo'r permission we'll retire," he said, calmly.

Dacy eyed him ominously.

"What d'ye mean by this, you—"

"Nefer yo' mint v'at he means," interrupted Joe. "I vant yo' to listen to me."

"Yo' shet up," roared Dacy. "Yo' danged sneekin' little Dutchman, what'n blazes air yo' doin' here, anyway?"

Joe was prepared to answer this question satisfactorily, but was interrupted by Keen.

"Come out now, we've got what we want," and he laid his hand on Joe's shoulder.

The party moved down-stairs and out of the house, while Dacy and his men set to work to clear up the scene of battle and care for their wounded companions.

Little Pete and three other Placer Ranch citizens who had been injured were carried to the "Golden Garter" in a wagon, while the two dead men were placed in charge of the local undertaker.

Kid Keen was at a loss to know how to treat German Joe. The young fellow had proved to be an adept at shooting, and had practically saved the day for Placer Ranch. Still he was suspected of kidnapping the girl, and it would scarcely do to let him escape without investigating the evidence against him.

Keen did not like to keep Joe a prisoner, but he explained the situation as plainly as possible, and the "Flying Dutchman" readily consented to accompany the party back to Placer Ranch and not to renew his efforts to escape.

Joe told Keen on their way back of his adventure with Nick Goodloe the night before, and of his finding the handkerchief bearing Grace Denmore's name in the "Badgers' Nest."

"I don't know noddings aboutt dodt knife mit my name on it v'ich t'ey found py t'e hammock. I nefer see t'e knife afore to-day," he concluded. "Id must hef been tropped t'ere py some von who wanted to lay it on me."

Kid Keen listened in silence to Joe's story, and then held out his hand.

"I don't believe yo' did it," he said, frankly. "And ef yo' didn't, we'll cum pooty near ketchin' ther right person. Whar do yo' stop in Placer Ranch?"

"I haf nodd got any place yet, budt I vhas expectin' to stay at Little Pete's," answered Joe.

"Well, mebbe yo'd like to bunk with me. I've got a pooty decent house down in the village, an' ef yo'r willin' I'd like ter hev you stop there."

Joe accepted the invitation gladly, and when Placer Ranch was reached he accompanied Kid Keen to his home where he passed the rest of the day and the succeeding night.

Quite early the next morning the two friends were in earnest consultation over their breakfast in Keen's cabin. Joe was in favor of a direct attack upon the "Badgers' Nest," and a forcible rescue of the girl from Dacy's clutches, but Keen thought it better to obtain her release, if possible, by other means.

The latter's counsel prevailed, and the new-made friends separated. Joe started out to find Nick Goodloe and follow him to the girl's hiding-place, while Keen set out for Silverside to keep his eye on Dacy.

Joe found Nick with very little difficulty, and succeeded after a short time in getting into conversation with him.

Nick was very angry over the accusations of some of the men present, who, in discussing the tragedy of the day before, openly referred to him as a coward in not returning with the reinforcements he had been sent after.

The reader will doubtless surmise the cause of Nick's neglect, but the others, in ignorance of the true reason, accused him of cowardice.

In a short time, Nick left the party and started on horseback for Silverside. Joe remained behind long enough to give him the impression that his absence was not noted, and then mounted his own horse and set out after him.

Nick traveled straight to the "Badgers' Nest," and Joe followed, dismounting when within pistol-shot of the building and tying his horse a little ways from the road in a small group of trees.

Here a wonderful transformation took place. Joe removed his long flaxen locks, replacing the wig with one of darker hue, and turning his clothing inside out. Then he took from his

saddle-bags a pair of black side-whiskers, which were placed in position; an old coat stuffed between the shoulders in imitation of a hump, and a crook-handled cane.

Thus arrayed as a Jew peddler, he limped toward the "Nest," carrying in one hand a small sachel containing samples of cigars and tobacco manufactured by an Eastern firm.

In the saloon a dozen men were gathered, busily discussing yesterday's battle, some of them bearing upon their person proofs of the good marksmanship of the Placer Ranch citizens.

The supposed peddler was given a cordial greeting by the inmates.

"Hallo, humpy!" exclaimed one of them. "What ar' you sellin' to-day?"

"Matches, cigars and tobacco," replied Joe in a wheezing tone. "Cigars—best domestic and imported. Pipes and smokers' sundries of all kinds."

The crowd gathered about as he exhibited his wares, Dacy and Nick Goodloe among them. The latter was evidently very much disturbed about something, for after glancing disdainfully at Joe's samples, he paced nervously up and down the room, keeping an eye on the stairway in the corner.

He was soon joined by Dacy, and part of the conversation that ensued was overheard by the peddler.

"I tell you that I must see the girl," said Nick earnestly. "It is very important that I should, for every hour now adds to our danger of discovery."

"An' I tell yo'," replied Dacy, still more earnestly, "that yo' air in danger of your life as long ez yo' stay hyer. These men know thet yo' wuz in ther gang that cum fur us yisterday, and it's more'n likely they'll pick a muss with yo' less'n yo' git out. Cum here in a day or two, when ther storm's kinder blowed ofer an' git ther gurl, but don't try to go up-stairs now."

Dacy's soberness impressed Nick, and he glanced nervously about him.

"All right," he said at length. "Mebbe yo'r right, but I don't more'n half believe it. I'll be here late to-morrow night, and yo' be sure'n hev things ready. I'll hev a minister, and, consent or not, thet gurl'll be Mrs. Goodloe before I leave ther house."

Dacy nodded approvingly, and Nick, remounting his horse, returned to Placer Ranch.

Joe soon disposed of his stock of tobacco, and was watching for an opportunity of sneaking up the stairway, when an individual entered and in an offhand manner invited the men present to have a drink at his expense.

Joe glanced up at the new-comer, and as he did so his face paled visibly and his hand sought the butt of a revolver concealed in the breast of his coat.

German Joe did not step to the bar at the stranger's invitation, and by not doing so he aroused the ire of the proprietor.

"What do yo' mean," roared Dacy, "by insultin' mv guests? D'ye think that such a little saved-off son-of-a-gun like yo' kin play me fur a sucker? Yo' come up here an' drink, or I'll pull ther head off yez."

This terrible threat brought the trembling peddler to his feet, and in great trepidation he asked for a glass of soda-water.

Dacy, now thoroughly enraged by Joe's apparently intentional insults, rushed from behind the counter and seized the peddler by the shoulder.

"See hyer, yo' imp uv of Satan," he cried, "I don't stand no nonsense from nobody, an' ef yo' want to hev sum fun at my expense, it'll cost yo' sumthin'."

Joe assured the angry man that he had meant no harm, but Dacy, only partly appeased, seized him by the hair and started for the door. The black hair and whiskers of the peddler were left in Dacy's hand, while their owner sprang back, drawing a revolver as he did so.

The cause of all the trouble, after paying for the drinks, caught sight of Joe's face just as his wig was torn off, and thrust his hand behind him.

"Joe Winthrop," he hissed, bringing out a revolver and cocking it in the peddler's face. "You've tracked me here, but now we'll part forever. I'll put a hole through that great brain of yours, and then maybe you will learn to mind your own business—in another world."

Joe had tried twice to shoot, but the hammer of his revolver only snapped on vacant cartridge-chambers and his hand dropped powerless to his side.

The other took careful aim, seemingly delighted in the torture he was inflicting, and when the polished barrel of his weapon was in line with the peddler's heart he pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS CRIME.

WE must now exercise the rather remarkable prerogative of a novelist and transfer the reader from the plains of Colorado to the civilized life and society of New York City. A New York paper about a month before the events narrated in the previous chapters, contained the following account of a mysterious murder:

"Joseph Schlerger, was cruelly assassinated yesterday morning at his residence on Fifth avenue. Mrs. Schlerger was the first to find the dead body of her husband, but the shock has so unnerved her that she can give no coherent account of the discovery.

"Mr. Dunning, a man of about thirty, who acted as private secretary and confidential clerk to Mr. Schlerger, was awakened by his wife about four o'clock in the afternoon. She said that something dreadful had happened to Mrs. S. who lay in a dead faint down-stairs.

"There is absolutely no clew to the murder—the purpose of which was made clear by the discovery that nearly \$50,000 in cash and bonds had been taken from the small iron safe, the key of which Mr. Schlerger always carried in his pocket."

The day following this notice appeared:

"The jury reached the usual verdict—death inflicted by some person or persons unknown—and the case has gone into the hands of Inspector Byrnes. Mr. Dunning expects to go West in a few days."

These and many other accounts of a similar nature were published in the morning papers and for nearly a week the public was kept posted on the latest phases of the great mystery. Then other sensations followed and it passed into the background, forgotten by all but those greatly interested in it, either from curiosity or sympathy for the afflicted family.

When the case was placed in the hands of Inspector Byrnes, he immediately put a dozen of his best men on it, one to chase to the end each seeming clew. One of these men was a detective, quite well-known to criminal society in New York, by the name of Joe Winthrop. He had been detailed to follow John Dunning and see if there was anything in the secretary's actions to connect him with the murder.

This Joe had done faithfully and well. He had clung to Dunning's heels during the long journey from New York to Denver, although an unfortunate incident at Chicago had revealed his identity to the latter and from there on he was compelled to travel disguised.

It is almost unnecessary now, in returning to Silverside and the "Badgers' Nest" to introduce to the reader the hump-backed peddler, whom we left in imminent danger of his life, and the man who stood over him with a smoking revolver in his hand was John Dunning.

When Joe had tracked the man to Silverside he had assumed the rôle of the "Flying Dutchman," and when asked his name in the "Golden Garter" had given that of the murdered man—the only one he could think of at the moment. He had gone to the "Nest" disguised as a peddler, hoping thereby to get an opportunity of rescuing Grace Denmore. His meeting with Dunning, therefore, was as unexpected as it was unpleasant.

"Curse you," cried the man, again cocking his revolver and aiming it this time straight in Joe's face. "I might have known you'd have armor on."

The first bullet had bounded harmlessly from the peddler's breast. But before Dunning could pull the trigger the second time, Joe threw his useless revolver with all his strength, straight into the face of the angry man.

It was about his last chance for life and he took advantage of it.

Partially stunned and blinded by the blood that trickled into his eyes from a deep cut in his forehead, Dunning staggered back against the bar, and when he recovered sufficiently to look about for the peddler, that individual was not in sight.

"Where's that man?" he yelled, dashing the blood from his face and running to the open door. "Why didn't some of you men stop him?"

"We thought yo' wuz able to take keer uf him alone," said Dacy apologetically. "Ther skunk is quicker'n chained lightnin'. Who is he, anyway?"

"He's a detective," said Dunning, dipping his handkerchief into a basin of water and bathing

his injured head. "He's tracked me here from New York and I'd give five hundred dollars to see him out of the way."

"Yo' would?" asked Dacy.

"Yes, sir, I would. If you want to undertake the job I'll give you that amount in cold cash."

Dacy looked nervously about him, and then said with a forced laugh:

"It ain't in my line, but ef I git a chance I'll do anything jest to oblige you."

"All right," said Dunning. "I wish to thunder you would. If I see him again I'll bet he'll go under or I'll know the reason why he don't."

"What's he follerin' yo' fur?" asked Dacy, innocently.

"He thinks I'm connected with a murder out East, and is watchin' me, I suppose, to see if he can't find some evidence to criminate me."

"I shouldn't be surprised ef you wuz," said the other, referring to the first part of the sentence. "But, anyway, it's yer own business."

Dunning looked sharply at Dacy, and having bandaged up his head, left the room. In Silverside he was stopping at the residence of a man named Darkin, who kept a place but little better than the "Badgers' Nest," known to the residents as the "Whitehouse."

He had come West ostensibly to engage in mining speculation, but why he had chosen such an out-of-the-way village to commence his operations in, probably he alone could tell.

Dunning had not been in Silverside a week before he had made friends with nearly all of its citizens.

The wound in his forehead proved to be a very painful one, and added several degrees to his hatred for the detective. After re-arranging the bandages several times, he returned to the "Badgers' Nest," and, finding Dacy busily engaged in presiding over a faro-table, he walked up-stairs to inspect a room which was being prepared for him.

Not knowing which of the many similar rooms had been set aside for him, he tried his key in several and finally opened one at the far end of the hall.

As he crossed the threshold, he was greeted with a scream from a person already occupying the room.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said Dunning, hastily retreating. "I thought this was my room because my key unlocked the door. I assure you I didn't intend—"

Grace Denmore, for it was she, interrupted the speaker with an eagerness that startled him.

"Oh, sir, if you will only let me escape now that the door is open. That horrible man has been keeping me here for a couple of days. I am the daughter of Colonel Denmore, of Placer Ranch, and was taken from home last Thursday by two men. Won't you please let me get away?"

This agonized entreaty was poured into Dunning's ears almost in a breath, but he took in the situation readily and proffered his assistance, which it is scarcely necessary to inform the reader was not entirely disinterested. The beautiful girl had made a decided impression on him, and he rapidly evolved a plan for transferring her from Dacy's charge to his own.

"You cannot hope to escape unseen now," he said. "But about two o'clock to-morrow morning I will be here to release you. Dacy will have retired by that time, and your flight will not be discovered for several hours."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" said the young girl, fervently. "My father will do anything for you, if you will only get me out of this terrible place."

"I will be pleased to do so," replied Dunning. "But I must go now; keep up your spirits until I return."

He bowed and smiled, and then leaving the room, locked the door on the outside.

"Well, this is what might be called a soft snap," he mused, walking slowly down-stairs. "I'll rescue the beautiful young girl from the heavy villain, and then play heavy villain myself. I reckon Darkin can accommodate her over to the 'Whitehouse,' and Dacy'll never suspect me of taking her from him. And at the same time, the Placer Ranch crowd will think Dacy is the man who's got the girl."

Dunning chuckled softly to himself, and throughout the afternoon and evening was in an unusually jovial mood. So much so that Darkin, asking the cause of his good humor, was told to prepare a room for the reception of a young lady soon to become Mrs. Dunning.

"And," said the former, "it's more than likely that she will be here some time to-night."

"Very well," responded Darkin. "Ther best in ther house is ready fur her—ez long ez yo' foot der bills. Which yo' always do," he added hastily, for fear that his guest would take offense at his reference to such a trivial matter.

When Dunning had left, Grace threw herself upon the bed and fairly cried for joy. Without knowing who her captors were or why she had been held a prisoner, the poor girl had been surrounded with a thousand unknown fears.

"Oh, if he should fail!" she thought again and again. "What on earth would I do? But he won't—he can't! I do so wish it was time for him to come."

And thus, trembling between hope and fear, Grace spent the long afternoon and evening.

Her supper was brought to her at midnight, but she could scarcely force herself to eat a mouthful, so great was her anxiety. The little nickel-plated clock on the mantel struck two at length, however, and almost before its echo had died away, a stealthy footstep in the hallway announced Dunning's arrival.

She flung a shawl over her head and shoulders, and almost rushed into his arms as her rescuer unlocked the door.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come," she panted. "I feared something would keep you. Let us go at once, some one may come."

The excited girl did not know that her companion's arm was resting across her shoulders as he locked the door and placed the key in his pocket.

"My dear," he said, calmly, "keep very still until we get outside. The slightest sound may awake Dacy or one of his men."

The two had scarcely reached the outside of the building before another key turned in the door of the room in which Grace had been confined, and three persons cautiously entered.

They were Phil Dacy, Nick Goodloe and a man called Parson Pete, a pretty tough-looking fellow who passed in the village as a regularly ordained Protestant minister.

The two former paused on the threshold and uttered a cry of dismay.

"She ain't hyer," cried Dacy, and the words were echoed by Nick Goodloe, who accompanied them by a suggestive movement toward his hip-pocket.

"Dacy," he said, and an angry light gleamed in his eyes; "I told you to keep watch er thet gurl an' yo' promised faithful thet yo' would. She's gone now, and I'm goin' to hold yo' to account fur it."

The proprietor of the "Badgers' Nest" was too completely paralyzed by the girl's disappearance to pay attention to Nick's threat. Several times he tried to speak, but not a word came from between his clinched teeth.

Suddenly he turned toward Goodloe like a tiger.

"Did yo' take thet gurl?" he hissed. "Yo' an' me were the only ones who knew she wuz hyer. She's gone now, an' by ther Eternal, Nick, I'll make yo' suffer fur it."

The two thoroughly maddened men stood looking into each other's eyes.

"Nick, whar's thet gurl?"

"Yo'd better ask, yo' sneakin' scoundrel! Didn't I trust her with yo' an' ain't yo' gone back on yo'r word? Didn't yo' hev charge uv her, an' didn't—"

Whatever further questions Nick might have asked were interrupted by the tramp of feet down-stairs, and before the disappointed trio could conceal themselves, a score of Placer Ranch men with Kid Keen at their head, came rushing down the narrow hall.

CHAPTER V.

NICK GOODLOE'S PARD.

A MAN well known in both Silverside and Placer Ranch as "Limpy Dick," must now be introduced to the reader. He came to the latter town with its first settlers and had drifted back and forth between the rival villages ever since. He was one of a class of men which more than anything else, is likely to discourage future emigration to the Far West.

A murderer and a thief, brought up in the very midst of the worst kind of crimes and criminals, his natural appetite for devilishness of any sort had been strengthened but not satisfied by past indulgences. In appearance he was singularly repulsive, one ear being entirely gone and the other showing signs of attempted amputation.

A bullet had plowed through the half of his leg when a boy, and this disablement had won for him the sobriquet of "Limpy Dick." His friends in Placer Ranch were very few, in fact

the only man who would acknowledge any deep regard for him was Nick Goodloe. A strange but lasting friendship had sprung up between these two, and there was no scheme too dangerous or plot too intricate, which, if proposed by one, would not be fully carried out by the other.

Nick's infatuation for Colonel Denmore's daughter was the only point on which the two pards differed. Limpy Dick did not like women of any kind or caliber, and when Goodloe asked for his assistance in kidnapping Grace, he at once attempted to dissuade his partner from the crime. But Nick was not to be thwarted, and after much argument he induced Limpy Dick to lend his assistance to the scheme.

Since the kidnapping the cripple had kept silent for fear of suspicion, most of the time remaining in the little log cabin near Placer Ranch. But when two days had passed he ventured out of his hole, and almost the first man he met was German Joe.

"Hello, Limpy," was the latter's salutation.

"Whar've yo' been so long?"

"Laid up with ther r'umatiz fur a week," replied Dick, gruffly. "Couldn't git out'n my bed."

"Too bad," said the Dutchman. "Does doct Nick Goodloe lif midt yo'?"

"Yes."

"Vell, I come aroundt to see him. Is he in?"

"No, not now; but ef you play keerds, yo' kin cum in an' wait fur him. We mought hev a cordi'l game uv poker, eh?"

Joe acquiesced and the two entered the cabin. Dick produced a pack of cards, which Joe readily saw were marked; but he made no objection, and the game began. Each one took in a pot, and then the door opened, admitting Kid Keen.

"Say, Limpy," he cried, excitedly. "Nick Goodloe's got into a muss with Phil Dacy, an' you'd better—"

The cripple threw down his hand, and seizing his rifle and cartridge-belt, rushed behind the cabin where his horse was tied. In another instant he was galloping madly toward Silverside.

"Waal, Dutchy," said Keen. "Thet wuz a pooty cute game. Now we've got rid of ther chumps, yo' search ther cabin an' I'll watch outside."

Keen had proposed that they search Limpy Dick's cabin, to see if they could find anything there to connect Goodloe with the kidnapping. Joe searched the single room very thoroughly, but nothing could be found that would tend to criminate Nick. But what he did discover, with a shock of surprise and delight, was a legal-looking paper bearing a seal, and under it the words:

"The Last Will and Testament of Joseph Schlerger."

He quickly slipped the paper into his pocket, and rejoined Keen outside.

"I vhas nodd flint anyt'ings," he said in a disappointed tone.

"All right," replied Keen. "We'll hev to look elsewhere."

"I tell yo'," said Joe, earnestly, as the two walked up the street, "the best thing ve can do vould pe to raid dot 'Padgers' Nest' to-night. Ter gurl ish dere now, budt Dacy may take her away ad any time. V'y nodd ged de boys togedder, and go for t'em to-night?"

"I guess we'll hev to," said Keen, slowly. "It's askin' a good deal uv the boys to go there again, but mebbe it would be best. We'll see."

The two spoke to a score or more of men whom they met, and all of them volunteered their services in the good cause, although not a few regarded German Joe with looks of suspicion. He had not yet explained why the knife bearing his name had been found on the spot upon which the girl had been kidnapped, and his failure to do so was not regarded in the right light by some of the men who had been at the first raid on the "Badgers' Nest."

But late that night, however, a party of horsemen, led by Kid Keen and German Joe—for Little Pete had not yet recovered from the gunshot wound in his right shoulder—trooped out from Placer Ranch to Silverside. The journey was taken leisurely, and it was morning by the time they reached the "Nest." The door down-stairs was unlocked, and the party trooped across the floor of the saloon and up-stairs. At the lower end of the hall they caught sight of the trio of rascals whom we left so much discomfited at the close of the last chapter.

"There they air," yelled Keen, cocking his revolver. "Don't let 'em git ther drop on yees!"

Dacy and Nick Goodloe looked sullenly at the advancing men, while Parson Pete cringed against the doorway.

"Well, what'n blazes do yo' fellers want hyer ag'in?" asked Dacy, in a tone of suppressed but fiery anger. "D'ye want more people killed by yo'r blanked foolishness?"

"Naw—we don't," replied Keen. "We jist come ter make a friendly call, an' incidentally to take home with us ther kurnel's daughter. We know she's here."

"Then yo' know a sight more'n I do," cried Dacy. "Ef yo' find her in this house I'll give yez one hundred dollars apiece—every one on yees."

This munificent offer did not abash Keen, who ordered his men to search the house forthwith.

"All right, if yo'r bound to do so," said Dacy, with forced calmness. "I'll go with yo' so's the boys will know what's up. Jest like's not they'll shoot a half a dozen of yez before yo' git through."

But they didn't!

The "boys," who were awakened, opened their eyes to stare a revolver in the face, and whatever protestations they might have offered were kept to themselves.

"Vell, t'er gurl don't seem ter pe heer," said German Joe, when the last room had been searched. "She certainly don't vhas on t'is flo'r, onyway."

"I guess yo'r right," said Keen, with a sigh, while a grin of malignant satisfaction lighted up the homely visage of Dacy. "Ther gurl sar'tinly ain't here, an' we owe Phil an apology fur disturbin' him."

But the apology was not made, and the disappointed men walked down-stairs, and, mounting, hastened back to Placer Ranch.

All but German Joe.

The "hayseed sport," as Little Pete had termed him, remained in the building long after the others had left it. He had concealed himself in a closet in the last room that had been reached, and when the others left, he kept perfectly still and was not discovered by Nick and Dacy, who waited until the sound of hoof-beats died away, and then resumed their quarrel.

"Nick Goodloe," began Dacy, "yo've took that gurl from hyer because yo' thought mebbe I wouldn't treat her ez I'd oughter."

"I didn't," replied Goodloe, hotly. "But if I did, is it any of yo'r business? Yo' ain't got no right to ther gurl. I'm payin' yo' to keep her, ain't I?"

Dacy nodded.

"Then why 'n thunder hev yo' let her git away?" continued Nick, walking up and down the room. "Why didn't yo' keep her ez I paid yo' to do? If she ain't escaped by herself—"

"She couldn't," broke in Dacy.

"Well, ef she couldn't do that, why then, some one hez taken her away. Did eny one know besides me an' yo' that she wuz kept hyer?"

"Only Limpy Dick, an' he wouldn't take her," said Dacy. "Ther cripple wuz hyer this afternoon, inquiren' about yo' an' ther gurl."

"I know," replied Nick. "He helped me git her frum ther kurnel's."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Goodloe said, moodily:

"Well, ther game is up, but ef I see ther gurl wot took that gurl, there'll be trouble. I hain't a man that kin be raised out'n his hand by any son-of-a-gun in this county, and if yo' took her, Phil, I'll—"

"I didn't," said Dacy, simply.

Nick glared at him a moment and then strode angrily out of the room, while the proprietor of the "Badgers' Nest" sunk into a chair and laid his head upon his arm on a table near him. He remained thus, deep in thought, for nearly ten minutes, and then walked softly out of the room and down the hall.

Joe now opened the closet door and stepped out. He had overheard the conversation between Dacy and Goodloe, and intended to profit by his knowledge. But before he could get to the door opening into the stairway that led to the saloon below, he saw in the semi-darkness the form of a man coming toward him. Joe shrunk back against the side of the wall, and, as the man drew nearer, he recognized John Dunning. His experience of the day before had taught him what to expect from that gentleman, and he hastily retreated to the closet, closing the door just as Dunning entered.

"I wonder if Dacy's in bed," muttered that gentleman, half aloud, as he set a small black sachel down on the floor beside him and

glanced about the room. "I guess not, for this is where he sleeps. I suppose— Why, here you are now."

Dacy started back as he caught sight of his visitor, but recovered himself at once, and said, a little impatiently:

"What d'ye want here now? I hev'n't hed a wink of sleep now fur two days, an' et this rate I won't hev any fur two days more."

He sat down and looked sharply at Dunning, who handed him the black sachel, saying:

"There's \$45,000 worth of Government bonds in that, worth at present about \$60,000."

Dacy stared at the speaker in utter bewilderment.

"They are mine, and I want them deposited in a bank to my credit. If you will take these over to Junita to-morrow and have me credited with the face value of them, I will give you the interest."

"Fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Exactly."

"But I—I never—"

"I know you never did," said Dunning, calmly. "Just have \$45,000 entered in a bank-book to the name of Samuel T. Warren, bring the book and a pad of blank checks to me, and keep the rest for yourself."

Dacy set the sachel back on the floor and walked several times around it before saying, slowly:

"That's a good deal of money."

"I know it, but it's all mine."

"And how 'o yo' know but that I wouldn't run away with ther hull boodle?"

"You can't very well," said Dunning, stretching the truth somewhat to suit his own convenience. "I would have their payment stopped."

"An' yo'll giv' me out 'n' out, in cash, fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll risk it."

Dacy picked up the sachel, and, carrying it to the closet in which Joe was concealed, opened the door and set it inside. The detective thought he had been discovered, but the darkness had concealed him, and the door was shut again.

"Be very careful of them," said Dunning, as he rose to go. "Don't let any one know you've got so much money in the house, and just as soon as you get back from Junita bring the book to me."

Dacy promised to do so, and after carefully locking the door walked with Dunning down-stairs and stood talking with him for some minutes at the front entrance. When he returned, he locked himself in his room and walked nervously to the closet.

"I wonder what them things are like," he muttered to himself, as he opened the door. "Ef I—"

The proprietor of the "Badgers' Nest" staggered back as if he had received a blow. He tried to utter a cry, but his lips refused to move, and he could only stare into the closet with wild, distended eyes. It was empty—the sachel had been taken away!

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSING FORTUNE.

For some time after making the discovery that the sachel and its contents had been stolen, Dacy stood glaring into the closet in stupefied silence. He had locked the door of the room when he left it to accompany Dunning down-stairs, and had found it locked when he returned.

How had the thief entered?

Dacy was not a man capable of grasping a perplexing situation very readily, and after one or two attempts at reaching a conclusion in the matter, he arose, and putting on his hat, hastened down-stairs.

"I'll hev to see the man that give me ther money," he thought, as he walked rapidly in the direction of the "Whitehouse." "Mebbe he'll think I took the money—but, anyway, he kin hev the bonds duplicated and the payment stopped."

With this comforting thought, Dacy walked into his rival's saloon, and having called on Dunning before, went directly to his room. He was just about to grasp the knob of the door, when the sound of a woman's voice within arrested him.

"Oh, sir, you said you would take me to my father, and here you are keeping me in as terrible a place as the other. Why will you not release me and let me go home?"

"Because, my pretty dear," responded another voice, which Dacy recognized as Dun-

ning's, "you're much too handsome to waste yourself on the people out here in the woods. I mean to take you with me to-morrow to a home in the East."

"And you won't let me see my father? Oh, if you only knew—"

"I know everything, my dear. If you will promise to accompany me on a wedding tour afterward, I shall have no objection to your seeing the old gentleman first. But otherwise you must stay with me. The landlord has fixed up a room for you on the next floor, and you will be left entirely to yourself."

"But—"

"No buts about it," he interrupted. "I mean to marry you whether you will or no. And I don't see why you should object. I am good-looking, rich and well behaved. I'm sure we'd make a good match."

Dacy heard a long-drawn sigh, and then the man added more earnestly:

"See here, now, you and I ought to get along together better than this. I mean to treat you like a gentleman should—"

"Then take me home," cried Grace. "Why torture me longer?—for I shall never willingly become your wife."

"Unwillingly, then," returned Dunning. "But I will have to leave you now. I am going to Placer Ranch, but Darkin will come here presently and take you to your room. Good-night."

There was no response as the man opened the door, and coming into the hall, locked it on the outside. No one was in sight, for Dacy had retreated to his own stronghold when he heard Dunning coming, and was now wrestling with his own unpleasant thoughts.

The many incidents and accidents of the day had so upset him that the discovery of the girl in Dunning's room had added but little to the perplexities with which he was surrounded.

"Ef this thing keeps up," he mused, as he prepared for bed, "I'm a-goin' ter leave ther place. Ther 'Nest' is raided twice, two men killed, \$60,000 stolen, a detective from New York State wuz in ther very house, ther kernal's daughter—"

But sleep, the balm to all wounds, and rest and comfort to troubles of all kinds, came to him in the midst of his woes, and the worst man in Junita county lay snoring on his bed as peacefully as a schoolboy.

But not so Dunning. That restless individual, after leaving Grace, mounted one of Darkin's horses and started for Placer Ranch. He was in an unusually happy and contented frame of mind, and sung snatches of operatic song as his horse ambled peacefully along the quiet road.

"I'll leave my money in the Junita Bank until I go East," he muttered. "It's giving Dacy a good deal for his trouble, but I reckon I'll be able to get it back again. Anyway, it is safer in the bank than at the 'Whitehouse.' I was beginning to suspect Darkin—these men out here are not all models of honesty. Dacy won't try to keep the bonds, however, for his ignorance of such things will give me the advantage of him."

Thus musing on everything that came into his mind, and occasionally expelling unpleasant thoughts with a snatch of song, he journeyed on to Placer Ranch, reaching that enterprising town an hour after daybreak. He rode up to the door of Limpy Dick's cottage, and tying his horse on the outside, entered without knocking.

Both Dick and Goodloe were on the inside of the cabin, the latter stretched out on a bed fast asleep, and the former trying to cook a piece of ham over a wood-fire in the stone chimney.

"Hello, Limpy," said Dunning, speaking softly for fear of waking Goodloe. "Why haven't you been to see me for the last few days?"

"I couldn't come," replied Dick, getting on his knees and trying to fan the smoke up the chimney with his broad sombrero. "I wuz mighty skeert over ther gurl bizness."

"Then you helped Nick kidnap her, eh?"

"Yes, but I didn't want'er, yo' can bet yer life. It wuz risky business, an' I tried to keep 'im frum doin' it. But he wuz all possessed fer ther gurl, an' in 'co'rse he hed ter hev her. An' arter all, we hed all ther trouble fur nothin'."

"Why?" asked Dunning.

"He took ther gurl down ter Dacy's, an' he promised to keep her tight till Nick wanted her. He went over last night and she wuz gone. Nick raised the Old Boy with Dacy, but didn't do no good, I reckon."

"And don't they know how the girl escaped?"

"Nick says he don't, an' Phil 'lows he hasn't any idee who could 'a' helped her. I kinder believe ther gurl got out herself."

Dunning looked at Dick curiously.

"Then it was you who dropped the knife with the Dutchman's name on it?"

"Yes; you give me the knife, an' I didn't know but it wuz all right. How'n thunder did it happon to hev his name on it?"

"It isn't his name," replied Dunning. "It's the name of a man out East, and why he's travellin' under it I don't know."

"Why'd you want me to shoot him fur?" asked Dick, hobbling out of his cabin for a fresh supply of kindling wood. "Is he anything to you?"

"Well, yes, slightly. And that's what I came to see you about now."

"You want me t' plug 'im?"

"Exactly."

"When?"

"At once."

"All right. I reckon I can accommodate ye."

"He give me this cut in the head yesterday, over to Dacy's. And I had the drop on him at the time, too. He wears chain-armor under his coat."

"I'll try his head," said Dick, grimly. "I reckon he don't wear chain-armor around his brain."

Dunning talked with Limpy Dick for some time longer, promising him a large reward for getting rid of German Joe, and when he left at nine o'clock he had received the assurance that the detective would be a corpse within twenty-four hours.

He rode slowly back toward Silverside, hoping that by the time he reached there, Dacy would have returned from Junita with his bank-book. But when he arrived at the "Badgers' Nest," the man who presided over the bar in the proprietor's absence told him that Dacy had left the place before daybreak, without letting any one know where he was going.

Dunning spent the day in fitting back and forth between the "Whitehouse" and the "Badgers' Nest," impatiently awaiting the arrival of Dacy. As night drew near and that gentleman did not put in an appearance, Dunning's impatience turned to anxiety, and he was about to go in search of the man whom he had trusted with his money, when Limpy Dick came dashing up to the "Whitehouse" and called to him:

"Git a horse, quick," he yelled, "an' cum with me. Dacy got in a row with Nick a little while ago over to Little Pete's, an' Nick put a bullet in him. The boys say it's all up with Phil, and he sent me for you."

In a few minutes the two were galloping back toward Placer Ranch, Dick trying to give a coherent account of the tragedy on the way.

"It seems that Dacy cum inter Little Pete's this afternoon, an' got 'er talkin' with Nick. They were at it for nearly an hour, an' then, all of a suddint, Dacy got out his shooter. Nick saw him jest in time, and in all my bo'n days I hain't never seen sech shootin' ez them two had. Both stood straight up an' let each other hev it. Phil went down on ther second shot, but he wuz a-goin' to die game, an' he riz up on his elbow and planted a bullet right w'ar Nick's heart oughter be. But it didn't do no harm, and he got one back that settled him. Nick hain't scratched."

Dunning listened to this narrative with a feeling of dismay. If Dacy should die before he could reach him, how would he be able to obtain the money he had intrusted to the murdered man? He frequently urged Dick into a faster pace as they dashed onward in the growing darkness, and by the time they reached the "Golden Garter" he was in a state of mind bordering on frenzy.

But his first question elicited the fact that Dacy was not yet dead, nor very likely to die.

"His jaw-bone's broke in two places," said the man who had volunteered to nurse the wounded man. "An' he's got a putty bad hole in his arm, but it ain't quarter enough to kill sech a man ez Phil Dacy."

Dunning was immediately conducted to the improvised couch, but its occupant was unable to give him any information. The entire lower part of his face was swathed in bandages, and his eyes were closed.

"It won't improve his looks," said the nurse. "But then Phil never wuz a beauty. Jest ez soon ez he is able to be moved we'll cart him to his own ranch. He's the first man shot in the place now fur over two weeks. Ole Bill Coon

said yesterday that we'd orter break ther record by spillin' some bad blood, an' I reckon we've done it."

Dunning turned away sick at heart and disappointed. It would scarcely do to search the body of the wounded man, and yet he felt sure that the receipt for his money was concealed somewhere about Dacy. He rode back to the "Whitehouse" in anything but an amiable frame of mind, cursing himself for ever trusting his money out of his sight.

Limpy Dick, after leaving Dunning at the bedside of his injured friend, hastened to his cabin, where Nick Goodloe had gone after the shooting. He looked a trifle excited when his partner entered, but otherwise showed no signs of the encounter.

"Yo' did well," said Dick, laying his hand on Goodloe's shoulder. "Ther' ain't many men in this country kin say they've downed Phil Dacy."

The simple compliment pleased Nick more than anything else would have done, and he put his arm around his crippled partner and said, with something of affection in his tone:

"I didn't want to down him, Limpy, but he kept at me until I got desperate. He went for his shooter first, an' ef he got ther worst uv it, he's to blame."

"What did yo' quarrel about?" asked Dick.

"Ther' gurl. He tried to lie to me, sunthin' about a man named Warren, who giv' him sixty thousand dollars which was stolen. Then he see this Warren hev the gurl. He thought I'd believe all ther stuff, an' when I called him a liar, he got on his ear."

Limpy Dick began to clear the table for their evening meal, his confidence in Goodloe's prowess increased a hundred-fold by the events of the afternoon.

CHAPTER VII.

GERMAN JOE IN TROUBLE.

WHEN Joe was left alone in the closet with the sachel containing \$60,000 at his feet, you may be sure that he did not waste unnecessary time in marveling over his lucky escape. The key had scarcely turned in the lock as Dacy went out with Dunning, before Joe had left his hiding-place. Two windows opened from one side of the room, and throwing open one of these, the detective crawled out on the ledge with the sachel in his hand.

"It can't be more than fifteen feet to the ground," he thought, peering out in the darkness. "This house is built on a side-hill, and I guess the upper windows can't be very far from the ground. I'll risk it, anyway."

Carefully lowering the window, and grasping the sachel in one hand, he swung himself from the ledge with the other and dropped to the ground. He had fallen in some deep black mud, evidently, for he sunk to his knees, and in attempting to extricate himself, floundered about in the darkness and buried himself still deeper in its clinging embrace.

And then for the first time he thought of the creek that had been turned from its course, as Kid Keen had told him some time before, for the purpose of washing sluice-boxes. This creek had been turned into an excavation running behind Dacy's house and out through a tunnel in the hill to a mining-camp in Horse-shoe Valley.

But why the creek had dried up, leaving behind it this sticky black mud, Joe could not conjecture.

But he realized very clearly that his life was in danger, for every time he struggled to escape he sunk deeper in the quicksand.

Finally he decided that even if he could keep his arms above water—or rather above mud—it would be impossible for him to retain possession of the sachel.

So, carefully estimating the distance it would go, Joe threw the sachel with all his strength. To his surprise and dismay, it fell in a body of water, as the splash accompanying its fall plainly denoted.

"Well, of all scrapes that any one was ever in, this seems to be the worst. I might rather have stayed in the room, and had it out with Dacy, than slowly suffocate heré. I've heard of such things before, but this is my first and probably will be my last, experience."

Joe reached about him with his hands, and struck the building from which he had just escaped. This might at least furnish temporary support, and grasping his knife with his right hand, he drove it with all his strength between the chinks of the logs, with which the rear side of the "Badgers' Nest" was constructed. This kept him from sinking any deeper in the mire,

but his utmost strength was not sufficient to release the lower part of his body from the soft but firm grip of the quicksand.

And we must leave him for a short time, and return to Kid Keen, who, after leading the rescuing party to and from Silverside, returned to his cabin and spent the remainder of the night in sleep. Late the next morning he arose, wondering where his partner had spent the night, and went over to Little Pete's for his breakfast. He remained in the "Golden Garter" until the shooting affray between Nick Goodloe and Dacy, and then becoming alarmed over the continued absence of German Joe, set out in search of him.

The men who had accompanied him to Silverside had not seen Joe return after the raid, and Keen concluded that the detective must either be confined in the "Badgers' Nest," or was following some clew affecting Grace Denmore.

"He's a mighty plucky little feller," said Keen, as he prepared to go in search of his friend. "But he's more'n likely to get hurt ef he fools around Dacy's. The men out there are kinder dangerous when they git excited, and jest like's not Phil has told them to down ther Dutchman. I wouldn't be surprised if Dacy himself wuz all broke up on ther gurl. She's a mighty pooty piece, but I don't see why she should cause us all this trouble. Ef ther boys find ther Nick's got his hand in ther steal, I'm afeard it will go kinder hard with him. Nick's a mighty quick shot, howsumever. Ther' ain't many men who've ever got away from Phil Dacy's pistol alive."

And thus ruminating on the events of the past few days, Keen rode on toward Silverside. In front of Colonel Denmore's residence he met that gentleman on horseback.

"Hello, kurnel," said Keen, reining up alongside of him. "I s'pose you've heerd uv our raid last night?"

"Yes," said the colonel, sadly. "You were so positive that Grace was confined at Dacy's that your failure was a great disappointment. Have you thought of anything else now that will help us?"

"Nothin' at all."

"And I have found no trace of a clue. That knife—"

"Don't amount to anything," interrupted Keen. "Ther' Dutchman wouldn't hurt a fly unless it hurt him. He's been tryin' hard to find yo'r daughter."

"Where are you going now?" asked Colonel Denmore, turning his horse around and riding by Keen's side.

"I've lost track of Joe, an' am goin' over ter Dacy's ter see whar he is. He wuz with us on the raid last night, but I hain't seen him since, an' I reckoned mebbe he'd got inter trouble of sum kind."

The two rode together for some time in silence, and then Keen said:

"Kernal, who's ther nice-looking chap over ter Darkin's place? Hav you seen him?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, I don't like his looks very well. I've seen him around here several times, an' it may be that he knows sunthin' about Grace. He's a dandified kind of a feller, but I reckon he ain't too good fur this climate, an' I think it would be a good plan to foller him for a spell."

"It might," assented Colonel Denmore. "When Grace returns, if she ever does, I shall leave Placer Ranch at once. My wife has so much improved in health that I think a journey South would do her good."

"But this other chap I wuz speakin' uv," continued Keen, not liking to drop a clue which to his mind presented wonderful possibilities.

"Can't we do sunthin' in his direction?"

"I think so."

"We might search his room?"

"But we couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"Darkin wouldn't let us, if the man himself wasn't there, and if he was, it isn't likely he would submit without a fight."

"Well, I reckon we kin fight, too."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"We might make a friendly call on the man, tell him we want some tips on mining matters, or something of that kind," he suggested.

"Just the idee," replied Keen. "You drop in on him now while I go to the Nest to see ef I kin find Joe."

Colonel Denmore promised to do so, and on reaching Silverside the two separated. Keen did not go direct to the "Badgers' Nest," for the bad blood between the two villages might get him into trouble. He tied his horse where there was little probability of its discovery, and fell

in with some of his acquaintances, who presently started for Dacy's, talking over the sudden downfall of their leader.

In the saloon, Keen got into an argument with some Silverside men, and not being able to keep quiet when he heard the followers of Little Pete maligned, he was speedily the center of an angry crowd.

"I didn't cum hyer to fight," he finally yelled, desperately. "But by ther great Eternal, ef yo' fellers air dyin' for a ruction, jist smell uv these!"

He thrust a couple of revolvers in the faces of his persecutors, but they took advantage of their numbers and spread out so that he could not keep the drop on more than two men at once.

It was very evident that the scout had got himself into hot water, for the men who surrounded him were angry and desperate. One of them had already covered Keen with a rifle, resting the barrel of it over the bar.

"Put up yer hands," he yelled, as Kid seemed disposed to make a rush on the crowd. "Put 'em up up or down ye go!"

The scout suddenly switched his left hand around and planted a bullet between the eyes of the man with the rifle. He sunk to the floor without a groan, and the weapon that had killed him stood staring another man in the face.

"Keep yer distance," he cried. "I told ye I didn't want'r fight, but when I'm forced to, I reckon I kin hold my own. Ef any one of yo'—"

The crowd made a sudden rush for him, and in spite of the deadly fire from his two revolvers, were soon in a position to effectually check his further resistance. But just as Keen had given up all hope of life, aid came from an unexpected quarter, and the crowd again retreated. From between the cracks of the logs in the rear of the room, a dozen whizzing bullets had scattered the crowd, leaving Keen an opportunity of escape, which he quickly took advantage of.

Once on the outside, he did not stop until he had got out of pistol-range of the "Nest."

"Well, that was a lively little fight," he panted. "I thought at one time I was a goner, but I reckon the kernal must'r been out there with his shooters. Or mebbe it wuz German Joe!"

This thought sent him back to the "Nest," quickly but cautiously. He made a detour so as to come up to the rear of the building, and peering over the top of a hill at the place where the shots had come from, saw something that made him reach for his revolver again.

At the foot of the hill and near the building, separated from Keen by a narrow stream of water, German Joe stood buried up to his thighs in thick black mud. In each hand he held a revolver, the barrels of which were on a line with a half-dozen angry men who had just appeared around a corner of the building.

Keen could not imagine how his partner had got into such a predicament, but he quickly realized that he was in a position to return Joe's services of a few minutes ago.

He lay flat on his stomach and thrust his revolvers out toward Joe's enemies, calling to them as he did so.

German Joe did not take his eyes from his revolvers, although he recognized with a pang of delight that his partner was at hand.

Just how this strange situation might have ended had the men tried to reach Joe, will never be known, for a sudden commotion in front of the "Nest" attracted their attention, and they disappeared as quickly as they had come. Keen hastened to his partner's assistance, wading into the creek, near the inner shore of which Joe was confined. He threw himself upon his stomach, and, grasping the detective around the waist with both arms, loosened him by several violent alternating wrenches and finally landed him on dry ground, although it required all of their united strength to accomplish it.

"How in tarnation—" began Keen, but Joe interrupted him.

"I threw a sachel in t'er creek here last night," he said. "Do you suppose it vhas floated off?"

"I shouldn't wonder if it had. What wuz in it?"

"Paper."

"Then it must hev. Ther creek runs over ter Lode Camp, an' we mought foller it ef yo' want'r. Wuz it valu'ble?"

"I should t'ink id vhas. Ofer sixty thousand dollars in it," replied Joe. "Vait until I can git some uf t'is mud off me an' I will help yo' look for id."

The two walked to the place where Keen had tied his horse, and there attempted to cleanse their muddy clothing. They succeeded in partially doing so after a time, and then cautiously returned to the creek. They followed it through the tunnel and down into Horseshoe Valley, but without finding the sachel.

Keen meanwhile had asked the detective so many questions that Joe finally divulged his identity and told his friend of his mission in that part of the country. The scout was surprised and delighted with the information, and readily promised to lend his services in running Dunning to ground.

"I hain't seen much uv ther man," he said. "But what I hev seen hasn't impressed me with enny luv fur 'im. I've kinder got the notion that he's had a hand in this Grace Denmore business."

"It may be," said Joe, dropping his German accent in Keen's hearing. "He's capable of doing almost anything. If we could only find the sachel, now, we'd have almost conclusive proof that he was a thief, if not a murderer."

But thorough search through the valley failed to discover the sachel, and by dark the partners returned to Placer Ranch, German Joe almost famished after his long fast.

CHAPTER VIII.

DUNNING LOSES HIS GRIP.

DUNNING had paid Darkin well to not reveal the fact that he was keeping at the "Whitehouse," against her wishes, a young and beautiful girl. If his host knew that she was Grace Denmore, he also knew enough to keep it to himself, and Dunning thought that his charge would be safe in Darkin's care.

And for a time it was; but Darkin, as susceptible to a woman's charms as most men, soon reached the conclusion that he had about as much right to Grace as any one else. And following out this line of thought after Grace had been confined beneath his hospitable roof for twenty-four hours, he soon reached a conclusion that gave him great satisfaction, but which threatened the peace and well-being of his guest.

And so it came about that when Dunning was notified by Limpy Dick to hasten to the bedside of the wounded Dacy, Darkin immediately began arrangements for a hurried departure.

He packed all the articles of value in the house in a covered camp-wagon, taking from Dunning's room nearly two thousand dollars in gold which that foolish individual had left locked in his bureau drawer. Then he proceeded to Grace's room and acquainted the frightened girl with the fact that she was about to change jailers once more.

"I hev concluded that yo' think about ez much uv me ez yo' did uv thet other man, so I'm a-goin' to take yo' ter Denver. I've got lots uv stuff with me, and we'll sport in great style out thar."

"You surely don't mean that you are going to take me still further away from home?" she gasped. "I'm sure I don't know what all you men intend to do with me, but if you will take me back to my father, he will pay you well for it."

"I don't want money," replied Darkin, recklessly. "I want you."

Grace sighed, but her feelings had received so many shocks within the past few days that she seemed hardened to almost anything.

"I sha'n't hurt you," said the man, trying to speak reassuringly. "I'll hev to gag an' bind yo' now, howsoever, for yo' might git t' yell-in' ef yo'r mouth wuzn't shut."

Grace did not attempt to resist as he tied a towel over the lower part of her face. She did not want to anger him, and thought that in going quietly she might escape at some future time.

He carried her bodily, wrapped up in a large shawl, down-stairs and out into the covered wagon in front.

Then he returned after a few small things of value which he had left behind, hastening back for fear that in spite of her fetters she might be able to escape.

He climbed into the front seat of the wagon and drove off without drawing aside the curtains to see if his prisoner was safe.

When out of sight of Silverside, however, he stopped the horses and went around to the rear of the wagon to release the girl. The news of the kidnapping had probably spread all over the country by that time, and it would not have been well for Darkin to be caught with her.

But he thought he would make it as comfortable as possible for Grace on the cushions in the rear of the wagon, and for that purpose he halted the horses.

"I'm sorry ter keep yo' in sech—"

Darkin stopped, and, with one hand holding the curtains aside, glared into the small apartment.

"Ther gurl ain't thar!"

He uttered this in a tone of voice in which surprise, anger and awe were strangely blended. Then he climbed back to his seat, and, picking up the reins, was about to turn around. But, thinking that he had gone too far already for turning back, he whipped up his horses and rode on toward Junita, from which place he had intended to take the midnight train for Denver.

The thoughts which thronged his mind were not very pleasant ones, and he cursed himself many times for his stupidity. But it was too late now for repentance, and he hurried along the lonely road, intent only on reaching Junita in time to catch the train for Denver.

"The gurl must hev made sum kind ov a noise inside ther wagon when I wuz in ther house," he thought to himself. "An' probably one uv ther boys heard her, an' lookin' in saw what wuz ther matter. Yo' kin bet thar'll be sum tall hustlin' when she tells her story. Ther country'll be too hot ter hold sum uv them fellers."

He reached Junita too late to catch the night train, in spite of his haste; and, much to his dismay, was forced to spend the night there or travel on in the darkness. He decided to do the former, first disposing of his horse, wagon and outfit to the highest bidder.

The proceeds of this sale, together with the gold he had brought with him from Silverside, gave him a large amount of ready money, and he felt unusually independent as he strode about the streets of the city, and rather inclined to rejoice over the fact that the girl had escaped him.

"She'd only be in the way now, always gettin' up a rumpus. I reckon she's better off ter home—ez well as myself. Ther' ain't nothin' I'd like better now, then— Why, here's Bill Carter, now."

Darkin was just about to say that he would be tickled to death to meet some one whom he knew, when a miner from Lode Camp, well acquainted with the former proprietor of the "Whitehouse," almost collided with him.

"Hallo, Bill, I wuz jest wishin' I'd meet some one I knew. Let's go over an' hev a drink."

"All right, Jack. I'm glad ter see yo'—what air yer doin' here?"

"I'm goin' out ter Denver fur a short trip," replied Darkin, leading the way to a saloon across the street. "I've got considerable business thar, an' it's time it wuz attended to."

"I'm goin' ter Denver myself," said Carter. "Do you see this?"

He held up to the light a small black, mud-stained sachel.

"Yes—what's thet?"

"I don't know. I found it in ther creek down ter Lode Camp. It's got a lot uv papers in it, and, fur all I know, they may be valu'ble."

"An' ye'r a-goin' ter Denver ter see about 'em?"

"Yes."

"Where wuz yo' goin' to take 'em?"

"I 'lowed mebbe I'd show 'em to a bank. They'd know ef they wuz worth anything."

"Well, ef yo' want t' let me take 'em fur yo', I'll save yo' the expense."

They had reached the saloon by this time, and entering, took seats at a card-table.

"I don't know," said Carter, doubtfully. "They may be worth a good deal of money, an'—"

"Wa-al, ef yer don't want'r trust me," interposed Darkin, "it don't make no diff'rance. I only offered to take 'em to accommodate you. Let's see ther things."

He opened the sachel and inspected one or two of the folded papers which were still damp from their late immersion.

"I don't know exactly what they air," he said, finally. "But it don't seem to me ez ef they could be worth a great deal. I'll give yo' one hundred dollars fur 'em, and fifty per cent. uv what I kin sell 'em fur—ef I kin git more'n thet fur 'em."

Carter gladly accepted this offer, and Darkin counted out the money in gold, taking possession of the sachel as he did so. He had more

of an idea as to the value of the papers than he was willing to admit to his credulous companion.

He had never seen a Government bond before, but he had a general idea that anything issued by the United States was worth its face value, and he concluded to risk the hundred dollars on it.

"Ef they ain't no good," he said, as the two left the saloon, "I'll bring 'em back to you so's to show you thet I'm on ther square."

"But this money's mine, jest ther same?"

"Thet's the idee."

"An' we go whacks on what yo' git fur 'em ef you kin sell 'em?"

"Yes."

"All right. Thet suits me up to ther handle. I wonder who lost 'em?"

"Ther" don't seem ter be any name on it," said Darkin, holding the sachel close to a street-lamp and examining some faint tracings on a silver plate fastened to its side. There wuz once, but it's worn off. Kin yo' make it out?"

He handed the sachel to Carter, whose eyesight was evidently better than his companion's, for he made out with some little difficulty a name which he wrote on a card, and after showing it to Dakin, placed it in his pocket.

"Joseph Schlerger! Why, thet's ther name uv ther Dutchman thet wuz over to my place yesterday."

The speaker emitted a long, low whistle, and then relapsed into silence, refusing to answer Carter's questions as to who the Dutchman was, and where he came from.

"It ain't no matter," he said, at length. "You've got your hundred dollars, an' will be money in on ther find, anyway."

"I know that," admitted Carter. "But I don't want ter rob any one."

"You won't, I guess. Ef ther Dutchman did lose 'em, I reckon he stole 'em frum some one else. Jest like's not he threw 'em away because they wuzn't wuth nothin'."

"Mebbe so," Carter admitted.

The two spent the evening together, and in the morning Carter returned to Lode Camp, while Dakin was to take the first train for Denver.

The latter's absence from the "Whitehouse" was the cause of much comment. His partner, a man by the name of Casey, professed entire ignorance of his whereabouts, but said it was quite probable he would return before morning.

When Dunning returned from Placer Ranch, and his visit to the bedside of Phil Dacy, he did not at once discover the loss of either his two thousand dollars or his fair captive. But when, on going to the latter's room a short time afterward, he came face to face with Colonel Denmore, he began to suspect that something was amiss.

"See here, sir," began the colonel, laying his hand on Dunning's shoulder, "I have found evidence that my daughter is, or was, confined in this house. Do you know anything about it?"

"She's not here," replied the other, unconsciously telling the truth. "Not to my knowledge, at least."

"I don't believe it," retorted the colonel. "You are the only one in this house who would be likely to do such a thing."

"But I assure—"

"You can't assure me anything," cried Colonel Denmore, hotly. "My daughter has been confined here, and I demand that you conduct me at once to her hiding-place. I shall stand no more of this, sir."

Dunning saw that the speaker was thoroughly in earnest, and he backed down stairs.

"I tell you I don't know anything about your daughter," he insisted. "I am merely stopping here for a few days before going East."

But the colonel was not to be convinced, and he brought out a revolver.

"Perhaps you don't understand what it is that you are doing," he said, with forced calmness. "I mean to kill you right here and now, unless you conduct me to my daughter, or prove that you are in ignorance of her hiding-place."

The terrible earnestness of the enraged man impressed Dunning with an idea of his danger, and after a minute's hesitation he said:

"I believe she is here, but the man who owns the house, and not myself, is to blame."

"Then take me to her," roared Colonel Denmore. "Show me where my daughter is confined. I'll attend to the man who brought her here later."

Dunning led the way to the room in which Grace had been kept prisoner, and producing a key, unlocked the door.

"She's in there," he said, gruffly.

But as the colonel rushed in to grasp his daughter to his breast, he found the room vacant, although there were plenty of signs about that showed of her late captivity. His anger was increased a hundred-fold by the disappointment, and he turned on Dunning like an enraged tiger. That gentleman was evidently greatly surprised by the absence of the girl, and his looks and tone denoted it as he said:

"She was here a few hours ago."

"Then where is she now?"

"I don't know."

"You must know! I tell you I'll kill you unless you take me to my daughter!"

"But I don't know where she is any more than you do. She was here this morning, for I saw her myself. Dakin must have taken her away, or else this man Goodloe has discovered her."

The man's earnestness did not impress the excited colonel with a sense of his veracity. The two walked down stairs together, the latter handling his revolver in a way that threatened the life of Dunning, who begged him to put it in his pocket.

The loud talk of the two, and the angry threatenings of Colonel Denmore were the causes of the commotion which luckily drew the attention of the men who had discovered German Joe in the quicksand, from that unlucky individual, to the people in front.

But, just as the colonel had threatened for perhaps the hundredth time, to put a bullet through Dunning's head, a man came up behind him and whispered a few words in his ear.

It had a wonderful effect on the excited man, who immediately put up his revolver and hastened to the place where the horse was fastened.

"Are you sure?" he asked, as the messenger assisted him to mount. "There can't be any mistake?"

"Nary a mistake," was the reply, as the colonel started on a rapid gallop toward his home.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATE OF THE FORTUNE.

AFTER German Joe and Kid Keen had changed their clothing, taken a bath, and placed themselves on the outside of a square meal, they felt much better, and in spite of the loss of the sachel, were inclined to think that the prospects of a speedy and successful termination of their plans were excellent.

They spent the evening in the "Golden Garter," where, strange to relate, Joe found a letter from New York awaiting him. It had passed safely through the mail to Denver, and from there on by messenger to Placer Ranch. As it is of as much interest to the reader as it was to the detective, we print it in full:

"NEW YORK, May 2, 1892.

"MY DEAR WINTHROP:—

"Another complication has arisen in the Schlerger case, which it will be necessary for me to call your attention to. The will of the old gentleman, made a few weeks before his death, cannot be found, and unless it turns up pretty soon, his wife and daughter will be left almost penniless. An old will, made in 1859, when Schlerger was unmarried, bequeaths his entire property to a charitable institution in Pennsylvania. This will, I am afraid, will have to be carried into effect unless the other one is found. I incline to the opinion that the person who killed the old man, and robbed the safe, took with him unintentionally a number of papers of no value to himself. I have sent a copy of this letter to all the men on the case, none of whom seem to be making any headway, however, and if you can throw any light on the additional mystery, you are requested to do so, and without delay."

German Joe read this letter twice, and then handed it to Kid Keen without comment.

"I've got the will in my pocket, and will have to start for New York to-night," he said, slowly. "I hate to leave at this time, but I'm afraid I shall have to."

"Why not send it through by Express from Denver?" asked Keen, when he had finished the perusal of the letter.

"It wouldn't do," replied Joe. "If I risked it Byrnes would kill me when I got back. I'll have to start at once. If you will keep right on with the case until I can get back, however, I guess we'll pull through all right. We've got almost enough evidence to convict Dunning now."

"But the sachel?"

"You'll have to keep an eye out for that. Dunning will not leave Silverside without it,

you may be sure, and while he's here you can try to gather still more evidence against him. I would like to know, for one thing, how the will got in Limpy Dick's cabin."

"It is mighty strange. I reckon he or Nick Goodloe must 'ev had sum dealin's with Dunning. Thet probably accounts fur the knife with ther Dutchman's name on it."

"I guess you're right. I wouldn't be surprised if Limpy had helped his partner steal the girl. They're a good pair to do such work."

After a few minutes more of conversation the two pards separated, Joe mounting Kid Keen's own horse to ride to Junita.

"It isn't likely I can get back inside of a month," he said, at parting. "But if you will keep an eye on Dunning, and not let him get away till I return, everything will be all right. Good-by, old man, I'll send your horse back in the morning."

"So-long," returned Keen, as the detective galloped off in the darkness.

"I hope he'll git thar safe," he muttered to himself as he returned to the saloon. "It's a good ways from hyer to New York State. He don't seem to mind it no mor'n if it wuz out ter Silverside. He's a mighty plucky youngster, an' I'm durned sorry he's gone."

Keen felt very lonesome lounging about the "Golden Garter" without his friend, and long before midnight he sought his cabin and retired.

Meanwhile German Joe was rapidly lessening the distance between himself and Junita, which is the largest village in the county, and is situated at the northern corner of a triangle, the two southern points of which are formed by Placer Ranch and Silverside. A road runs from the former place direct to Junita, while the city is reached from the latter either by a cattle-trail running across the hills or by the longer route through Placer Ranch.

Darkin in running away from Silverside with his stolen goods took the cattle-trail for Junita only a couple of hours before the detective set out for the same place by the Placer Ranch road.

Both, by a strange coincidence, missed the night train for Denver, and Joe, walking about the streets, soon caught sight of Darkin and Carter entering a saloon. Ordinarily he would not have followed them, but he quickly detected the sachel in the latter's hand as he raised it to the light for his companion's inspection.

"There's just what I want," he thought, hastening toward the saloon. "I wonder how that man got hold of the bonds. I'll follow him and see what he does with them. I must get the sachel back if I can."

He waited on the outside for nearly an hour before the two men appeared, and then noted the fact that Darkin carried the sachel. The latter walked directly to the Kirby House, the largest hotel in Junita, where he engaged a room for the night. Joe proceeded to do the same thing, and when Darkin retired, he entered his own room and hastened to change his attire for his Eastern trip.

The buckskin coat, trousers and leggins were removed, and he donned a suit of "store clothes" and a derby hat. The drummer's outfit, which had served him before now, gave him the appearance of a commercial traveler, and in this disguise he thought it very probable that he would pass Darkin unrecognized, particularly so since that gentleman had only seen him once.

He slept but little during the remaining hours of the night, for fear that the man would escape him. But his vigilance was uncalled for. Darkin, never a very early riser, slept until ten o'clock, and then after a hasty breakfast walked to the railroad station and took a train for Denver. Joe followed him, hoping to get an opportunity of stealing the sachel on the way. But Darkin, knowing its value, did not remove his hands from it until in his seat on the train. The detective sat behind him, trying in vain to think of some way of regaining possession of the bonds, until nearly half way to Denver.

Then Joe was delighted to see Darkin show signs of sleepiness. He was evidently unused to railway travel, and the motion of the train soon rocked him to sleep. His arm, however, was thrown around the sachel, even in dreamland, and the detective could hardly hope to remove it without awakening him. But he tried nevertheless, thrusting his hand around through the arm of the seat in front of him, and gently pushing the sachel away from the sleeping man.

Darkin emitted several violent snorts during the process, but he did not awake sufficiently to know what was going on, and when the train

stopped at Kiowa, about fifteen miles from Denver, the bonds were once more in the detective's possession. He left the car at the station, leaving Darkin snoring peacefully on as the train resumed its journey to Denver.

"Now, that I've got the stolen bonds and the will, I guess I had better telegraph to Byrnes to have a warrant sworn out for Dunning's arrest, and a couple of men sent here to serve it."

He wrote out a message to that effect, and delivered it to the telegraph operator at the station. Then he sat down to wait until a train would stop on its way back to Junita, for he had resolved to return to Placer Ranch and finish his work, which he thought would not take him, at the most, more than a week.

"Just as soon as Byrnes's men get out here with the warrant we'll arrest Dunning for the robbery, and then let him explain old Schlerger's murder. He'll have a nice time doing it, I think. The man is in a pretty bad box now, for his money's gone beyond recovery, and he won't leave Silverside broke."

Joe opened the satchel, wondering what had caused the increase in weight, and found on the inside the thousand dollars in gold which Darkin had stolen from Dunning before leaving the "Whitehouse."

He was quite sure that the money had not been there when he had possession of the satchel before, although he had not opened it, and so he concluded that it was the personal and lawful property of Darkin. He had no intentions of taking that which he had no legal right to, and he resolved to return the money in some way to the proprietor of the "Whitehouse."

"I suppose that man who was with Darkin last night," he mused, "must have found the satchel in the creek, and gave it to him to take to Denver to sell. I wonder if either of them knew what the bonds are worth? I'll have to put them where they'll be safe in the future, for I wouldn't risk them in any one else's possession again for the world. I guess we'd better bury the whole thing in Kid Keen's cabin until I get ready to start East. I wish that train would come along—it's most deuced slow business, this waiting here."

The detective paced up and down the platform of the station until six o'clock in the evening, and then caught a train back to Junita. It was late at night when he arrived there, but he concluded to go right on out for Placer Ranch, and for that purpose again changed his clothing, resuming the buckskin garb of German Joe.

It was nearly daylight when he knocked at the door of Kid Keen's cabin, and told who he was in response to a gruff "Who's there?" from within.

The door was thrown open, and instead of the handsome face of his partner, there appeared the angry visage of John Dunning, and behind him Joe caught sight of Limpy Dick and Nick Goodloe, while on the bed in one corner lay Kid Keen, bound, gagged and bloody.

"Here's the man now," cried Dunning. "And by the great eternal he's got ther satchel!"

CHAPTER X.

THE UPPER HAND.

WHEN Colonel Denmore left Dunning, after charging him with the theft of his daughter and several times threatening to shoot him unless he produced her forthwith, the later re-entered the "Whitehouse." He was even more surprised than the colonel over the girl's sudden disappearance, and at once sought Darkin to see if that individual had had a hand in her escape.

But Darkin was not to be found, and Dunning, becoming alarmed, went to his own room and soon discovered the loss of his gold.

"He's robbed me and gone off with the girl!" he exclaimed, rushing down-stairs to give the alarm. "I'll have that money back if I have to chase him to Europe!"

Into Casey's ear at the bar below Dunning poured the story of his wrongs; but to his surprise and disgust, that gentleman greeted it with genuine delight.

"D'ye mean to say that Jack's gone?" he asked.

"Yes, and he's taken—"

"Gone fur good?"

"Why, of course; and—"

"Whoop-eel! Ther 'Whitehouse' belongs ter Dave Casey," yelled the man, executing the intricate steps of a Silverside war-dance behind the bar. "Call in ther boys till I set 'em up."

"But aren't you going to help chase Darkin?"

"Chase nothin'—d'ye s'pose I want 'im back?"

"But he's got my money!"

"Ther divil wid yer money. Don't yer see that ef Darkin clears out, this shanty an' fixin' comes to me?"

Yes, Dunning said he saw all that, but also realized with perfect clearness that he had lost a sum of money in gold that would build several "Whitehouses."

"But ther ain't enny uv my funeral," said Casey, gleefully. "You'd oughter kept yer eye on der boodle. Yer didn't 'low that Jack would keep his hands off'n the thousand dollars once he saw it, did ye?"

Dunning said that he had entertained that idea.

"I didn't suppose you were all thieves out here, and I don't mean to allow him to git away with that money. I want you to get some men and horses, and go with me to fetch him back."

"Nary!"

"I'll pay you well for it."

"No, sir. I don't want Jack Darkin back 'ere, an' ther man, thet fetches him back will hev to answer to me fur it."

Dunning was disgusted.

"You may think that you can play me for a fool," he said, threateningly. "But I want you to understand that I'm in earnest. I more than half believe you are implicated."

"I'm what?"

"I think you are in with Darkin in this scheme to rob me."

Ordinarily Casey would have regarded such an insinuation as an insult to be wiped out in blood; but now the acquisition of Darkin's property had made him so good-natured that he said, simply:

"I wish I wuz. I reckon thet ef I'd 'a' seen ther boodle fu'st, Jack 'u'd never have a hand in takin' it. I'd a darn sight rather hev the thousand dollars then this place!"

"Then you won't help me to catch this man?"

"Nary a catch."

Dunning walked out of the saloon in a very angry and disgusted frame of mind. Everything had gone wrong with him for the past few days, and with the loss of the thousand dollars he became bankrupt, at least as far as ready money went.

"I'll have to see Dacy at once," he thought, "and get some money from those bonds. If that fool only hadn't gone and let himself get shot, everything might have turned out all right. It's too dark to do anything more to-night, but the first thing to-morrow morning I'll go over to Little Pete's and get Dacy to give me my bank-books and checks. Then I'll be all right in spite of this thousand dollars. There's just two men on this earth that I'd like to see killed. This man Darkin and Joe Winthrop, and perhaps that son-of-a-gun who's took charge of the 'Whitehouse' now. He's the stubbornest man I ever see, and if I get a chance to do it, I'll make him sorry for going back on me."

Dunning kept growling to himself, until he finally went to his room and undressed.

"There's some satisfaction in the thought that there isn't anything else for them to steal," was his final reflection before sleep put an end, temporarily, to his mental woes.

His determination to rise early the next morning was not carried into effect, and it was nearly noon when he finally dressed and went down-stairs to breakfast. There he had another wordy encounter with the new proprietor of the "Whitehouse," whose good nature alone prevented him from laying violent hands on his unruly guest.

"I reckon ef yo' ain't suited yere, yo' kin git out," he said. "I ain't beggin' yo' tu stay 'ere, am I?"

"No, you're not," growled Dunning in reply, for his angry mood of yesterday had not passed away, "and I guess it's because you know there's nothin' more that I've got to steal."

Casey did not reply, and Dunning, still muttering to himself, appropriated one of the horses belonging to the house and set out for Placer Ranch.

"When once I get that forty-five thousand dollars in my hands," he reflected, as he rode rapidly along, "I'll leave this place a good deal quicker than I came here. I wanted to find an out-of-the-way part of the country, so as not to be discovered, and I guess I've got it. If that detective was laid out now, I would be satisfied. I'll either kill him myself, or get Limpy Dick to do it, and then I'll light out."

He reached the "Golden Garter" about four o'clock in the afternoon, and was at once shown to the room in which Dacy was confined. He found that the proprietor of the "Badgers' Nest"

was doing very well, and contemplated removing to his own home the next day.

As soon as he saw Dunning, his eyes flashed angrily, but his jaws were so tied up that he could not speak.

"Hello, Dacy," said his visitor. "I'm glad to see you looking so well. I came around after those bonds I gave you to take to the Junita Bank," he added softly, as the nurse appeared in the room. "Did you deposit them?"

A pad of paper and pencil lay at the wounded man's right hand, and he quickly wrote a few words on a sheet and handed it to his companion.

"They wuz stole; I ain't got them."

This was all. But it conveyed to Dunning an intelligence that almost paralyzed him, and dropping the paper, he stared at Dacy in stupefied silence.

"Wh-what do you mean?" he gasped at length. "You are not trying to tell me that you've lost the bonds?"

Dacy signified by a nod of his head that such was indeed the case, and, picking up the pencil, again wrote:

"Arfter I hed put them in the closet an' gone down-stairs with yo', I cum right back. They wuz gone then."

Dunning could not realize for a moment the extent of his loss, but a deep, wild anger surged up in his heart against the man before him.

"You lie!" he said wildly, looking into Dacy's glittering eyes. "You've got them bonds, and if you don't tell me where they are, I'll—"

"Hold on, cully; yo' ain't a-goin' to draw a pop on a man like thet?" exclaimed a voice at Dunning's side. "What kind uv a galoot air you to shoot a man when he's down? Put thet up, or I'll fire yo' out'n ther room."

The nurse looked more than capable of carrying out his threat, and the person addressed returned the half-drawn revolver to his pocket.

"I couldn't help it," he said, angrily. "This man here, if he is near dead, has robbed me of fifty thousand dollars. I'll get it back if I have to shoot all the men in the place."

"Well, yer mought begin with me," suggested the nurse. "But until Dacy gits well I ain't a-goin' to let no one fool around him."

The wounded man regarded the declaration with approval. He nodded his head vigorously, and wrote on a sheet of paper a denial of Dunning's charges, accompanied by the statement that "jist ez soon ez I git well I'll make him sicker'n lightnin'."

"I don't want to interfere in no private matters betwixt you two," said the nurse, handing the paper to Dunning. "But I ain't a-goin' to let a sick man he murdered right afore my eyes."

"But he's got all my money," howled Dunning. "I lent it to him day before yesterday, to deposit in the Junita Bank. He says now that it's been stolen, and I know he lies."

The sick man here showed signs of hysteria.

"Ef you r'ile P il much more he'll do sunthin terrible. Jest wait fur about a week, an' then I reckon he'll be able to talk to you," said the nurse. "Jest ez soon ez his jaws git in workin' order he'll prob'ly tell you all about it."

"But my money—"

"Ther deuce with you an' yo'r money. You can't cum here an' raise Cain with a man more dead than alive, not when Joe Mack's a-tendin' uv him," roared the nurse, now thoroughly exasperated. "An' less'n yo' c'lar cut'n hyer mighty soon, I'll put yo' out!"

Again Dacy manifested his approval by a vigorous nod of his head, and Dunning strode out of the room, pouring maledictions upon the heads of everybody and everything he could think of. Down-stairs he met Limpy Dick, and the cripple, seizing his arm, led the way toward his cabin.

"I wuz jest goin' over ter Silverside fur yer," he said. "I reckon we've got a plan ter lay out ther Dutchman fer you."

But his companion took little interest in the death of the Dutchman, or of any one else, just then, and he said so.

"I guess we'll have bigger game than that," he said, angrily. "I've just lost over fifty thousand dollars."

Limpy Dick stopped and whistled softly.

"Whar'd ye lose it?" he asked.

Dunning knowing that he could rely implicitly on the cripple, told him the whole story—or that part of it which was not already known to him.

"An' Phil says thet sum one stole ther boodle frum him?" asked Dick.

"Yes."

"And he don't know who?"

"I didn't ask him. He had a man there who wouldn't let me talk to him."

Limpy Dick walked on in silence until the cabin was reached, and then said:

"I dunno what we kin do jest now, but I reckon we'd better carry out the plan I wuz goin' ter propose about the Dutchman. It mought give us some clue to the sachel."

Dick unfolded his scheme to Dunning, and was pleased to find that it met with his hearty approval.

"There's a good deal of danger about it," he said, however. "Both Keen and the Dutchman are fighters from away back."

"I know thet, but Nick will help us, an' by takin' one at a time I reckon we kin pull through. We'll go to Kid's cabin to-night, an' ef he's thar alone we'll do him up, and then wait fur his pard. Ef Dacy hez lost the sachel ez he sez, it's mor'n likely thet either Keen or ther Dutchman know sunthin' about it."

"That's so," assented Dunning.

"An' after we've got away with these two we'll tackle Dacy. It won't take long to find whar he's put the money ef he's got it et all."

Dick's hopefulness did not arouse much enthusiasm in Dunning, however, and when the time came for the assault on Kid Keen's cabin, he was the only one of the trio that was in favor of abandoning the scheme.

But Limpy Dick and Goodloe—who had volunteered his service—screwed up his courage, and quite late that night the three set out, well armed, for Keen's stronghold.

German Joe, as the reader knows, had left some time before for Denver, on his way to the East, and the trio of desperadoes found his partner alone and asleep. But to bind and gag the suddenly aroused scout was by no means an easy matter, and when it was finally accomplished, the interior of the cabin gave evidence of the free fight that had taken place.

Dunning had gone under at the first blow from Kid Keen's big fists, but he assisted his comrades materially by occasional encouraging shouts from under the bed.

Limpy Dick, at the conclusion of the affair, noted in a small mirror on the wall that his peculiar style of beauty had been considerably improved by the loss of nearly all his hair, and that his nose had been flattened out to nearly double its dimensions by one blow from his antagonist's fist.

Nick Goodloe showed up two black eyes and a deep cut under one ear as his memento of the conflict. But taken all in all, the two partners were inclined to look with satisfaction upon their victory, and were even charitable enough to arrange Kid Keen, bound and gagged beyond all resemblance to his former self, comfortably upon the bed.

And it was while Dick and Goodloe were engaged in this kindly service that German Joe applied for admission. The two partners at once prepared themselves for the second battle as Dunning opened the door.

CHAPTER XI.

DUNNING REGAINS HIS GRIP.

FOR a moment after the door was opened, German Joe stared at the intruders in amazement. He realized that he had walked into a trap, and when Dunning made a grab for the sachel, he threw it behind him as far as possible, at the same time seizing his revolvers.

"V'ot ish dis?" he asked, stepping backward a couple of paces. "V'ot for you haf Keen tied dot vay, don't id?"

"Here, Limpy," cried Dunning, "shoot the son-of-a-gun while I grab the sachel."

For obvious reasons neither order was obeyed, and in an instant a revolver stared each of the men in the face, and the form of German Joe blocked the doorway, effectually preventing egress.

"Look oudt, yo' miser'ble rascals!" he cried. "I vill plow taylight troo der fu't man dolt lays his hands on me. V'ot are yo' vellers doin' here, anyway?"

The question was directed to all three of the rascals, but not one of them had the good grace to reply. Dunning was trying to get out of range of one of the Dutchman's pistols, and Limpy Dick and his partner were dividing the drop of the other between them.

Goodloe, of the three, retained the most presence of mind, and realizing that the Dutchman would be unable to cover all of them at the same time, he seized the form of Kid Keen from the bed and held it in front of him, much to that gentleman's disgust.

"Put him down," ordered German Joe, changing his aim from Limpy Dick and trying to fix

it on some visible portion of the anatomy of Dick's partner. "V'ot for you do dolt?"

As the aim of the weapon was removed from Limpy Dick, the cripple made a spring for Joe, knocking the revolver from his left hand, and thus liberating Dunning, who was quick to take advantage of the opportunity thus offered and rush for the door.

Crack! Crack!

The revolver in German Joe's right hand spoke twice, and Limpy Dick fell to the floor, never to rise again, while another bullet buried itself in Nick Goodloe's shoulder.

But Dunning had escaped through the doorway, and as the Dutchman wheeled about, he could just see him darting down the street, with the sachel in his hand.

Joe gave chase, sending a dozen bullets after the fleeing man, but in vain.

"The sachel's gone again," he uttered, with a groan, returning to the cabin, the inside of which now resembled a battle-field swept by a tornado.

Kid Keen, bound and gagged, with blood over his face and clothes, lay near the door in the position Nick Goodloe had dropped him when hit by the bullet. Nick himself sat on the bed, moaning with pain; one arm hung useless at his side, and blood oozed in tiny streams from his finger-tips.

Limpy Dick, with a bullet in his brain, lay partially doubled up, one hand resting on a pistol-butt protruding from his belt. The floor and walls were spattered with blood, and everything about the cabin gave evidence of the terrible battle that had just occurred.

German Joe first released his partner, paying no heed to Goodloe's pitiful cries for assistance, until Keen had stretched his arms and legs and pronounced himself uninjured.

"I wish to thunder we hadn't 'a' done it," groaned Nick, as the Dutchman approached him. "If you'll let me go to my cabin and fix up this arm a little, I'll leave ther place to-morrer. I reckon poor Limpy ez done fur. I never seech shootin' in my life—an' I reckon I ain't no chicken."

The partners readily consented to Goodloe's request, and were glad to bandage up his arm and get rid of him. If they bore him any ill-will, the sight of the dead, crippled body on the floor dispelled it, and both breathed a sigh of relief when he quitted the cabin, carrying under his left arm the inanimate form of his old partner.

Keen sunk back on the bed and rested his head on his arms.

"I hope I'll never again see a night like this," he said, fervently. "I wuz woke up out of a sound sleep, hit over the head with a club, jumped on an' shot at, an' finally bound an' gagged by ther rascals. I thought it wuz you thet wuz after, an' I wuz jest grinnin' all over to myself to think you wuz prob'ly out to Denver—when in yo' walks, natural as life."

German Joe sat down by his partner's side and told him the story of his journey, how he had found the sachel in Darkin's possession, and following him, was able to steal it and return.

"And now," he concluded, mournfully. "I'll have to do all my work over again."

"Thar's one thing, howsomever, thet's in our favor," said Keen, grimly. "We've kinder thinned out our enemies. I never seech quick shootin' as you did jist now. Ef yo'd only planted Dunning instid of Limpy, we might hev kept the sachel. I wonder whar he'll go with it now?"

"I don't know, but I suppose we must follow him as soon as possible. I must get a little sleep now, for I haven't had a bit of rest for two days."

"Then, yo' ain't a-goin' to New York State?"

"Not until I get that money, and can take Dunning back with me," replied Joe, firmly.

"Good boy," said Keen. "We'll chase Dunning to his hole if it takes us a month. I don't s'pose he'll stay in this place very long, though."

"He will probably leave to-night," returned Joe. "And we'll have to try to catch him to-morrow, or at least find out whar he's gone."

"It's to-morrow now, I reckon," said Keen, referring to the time of day. "We'll turn in an' git sum sleep now, an' when we git up, we'll see whar we kin do to'ards gittin' back ther sachel."

"But, old man," said the detective, laying his hand on his partner's shoulder. "I don't want to put you to all this trouble. I have no—"

"Don't yer say a word, Dutchy," returned the scout, heartily. "I'd rather help yo' run thet man to the ground than not. Ef I kin do ennythin' fur yo' jist speak, an' I'm thar!"

"All right, you'll have to come East with me afterward and join Byrnes's staff."

"Mebbe," said Keen, slowly, and so the compact was settled, and the two partners lay down to put in a few hours of sleep.

About ten o'clock Keen awoke, and after breakfasting the two began their search for Dunning and the sachel. They separated soon after, each to follow the clue he might strike first, and if it proved successful, to notify the other at once. Keen we must leave for the present, and accompany the detective as he starts out again upon the trail he had almost run down the day before.

He was not disheartened by his failure—if such it might be called—and renewed his quest with as much zeal as he had taken it up a month before.

He first went to the "Whitehouse," and in an interview with Casey found that Dunning had called there early in the morning, and taken all his things, and left on a horse which he purchased from the proprietor.

The man did not know where he had gone, but suggested Junita as the only probable outlet from that part of the country. He told Joe of the possibility of Darkin's having stolen the thousand dollars from Dunning. A couple of questions elicited more information from Casey.

"Darkin took ther gurl with him, an' thet r'iled ther man terrible. He 'lowed he wuz ther only one ez had er right to her, but Jack he up and carts her off, slicker'n grease. I 'low they must be a good many miles from hyer by this time, eh?"

Joe was in much doubt on this point, but he nodded his head, wondering why he had not seen the girl in Darkin's possession, if he had taken her with him.

"Then you think der man Dunning vhas gone ter Junita?" he asked. "Ish dere no other place he could go to from here?"

"Not thet I know uv!" replied Casey. "He seemed in a tremend'us hurry, an' lighted out in thet direction."

"About six o'clock t'is mornin'?"

"Yes."

"Vhell, I vhas mooch opliged for de information; goot-tay!"

Joe remounted his horse and set out on his journey to Junita. His saddle-bags were filled with clothing and material to be used in disguises, but he concluded to put on his drummer's outfit once more. It was the easiest to assume, and in the West a commercial traveler is getting to be quite a familiar character.

He changed his clothing on the way, and when he reached Junita, late in the afternoon, the habiliments of German Joe were in the saddle-bags, and the detective appeared in the unmistakable guise of a traveling salesman. At none of the hotels had a person of his appearance registered, and at the only railway station in town the ticket-agent was quite positive that he had not bought passage on the outgoing train.

But Joe was not easily discouraged, and he relied on Casey's belief that Dunning had come to Junita. He thought it very probable that the man would try to deposit his bonds in some local bank, for fear of exciting suspicion if he attempted to dispose of them in a larger city, where it was probable they had been advertised as stolen goods.

During the evening the detective sought a number of places in which he thought it possible Dunning might be found, and his efforts were at length rewarded with a sight of the fleeing man. He walked into a gambling-house on a quiet street near the outskirts of the town, and on entering heard, in a familiar and excited voice:

"I tell you I had those chips coppered!"

"And I tell you that you were playing them open," returned the dealer. "I'm not blind, if you are."

"I say they were coppered, and I want the hundred dollars. Do you suppose I'm a-goin' to give you my money like that? I had fifty dollars on the ace to lose, and I won't be cheated out of it, either."

The angry, menacing tone the detective recognized at once as Dunning's, and his heart beat high with hope as he peered at the excited crowd surrounding a faro-table in one corner of the room.

Dunning, almost white with anger, was standing over the table shaking his fist in the dealer's face.

"Give me my money," he howled. "I came here to play a fair game, and I won't be cheated. Give me my money!"

The dealer turned a trifle pale and attempted

to go on with the game, but Dunning brought his fist down on the table with a force that sent the red, white and yellow chips in every direction and again demanded his money.

It was evident that a fight was imminent, but the proprietor of the place settled matters by permitting the angry player to have his way, knowing full well that the money would eventually be his.

The game went on for nearly an hour, Dunning steadily losing. Then, with an oath, he arose and started for the door, Joe noting instantly that the sachel was not with him.

The man hastened toward the business portion of Junita with the detective close upon his heels. He was evidently very suspicious, for he frequently looked about him, and it was with much difficulty that Joe evaded discovery.

"He's probably left the sachel somewhere for safety," the latter thought, "and went to the faro-table with some of the gold. I'm glad the two thousand dollars doesn't belong to Darkin, for it would cause considerable trouble to return it. That sachel has changed hands very frequently within the last month. Hello!"

The exclamation was caused by seeing the man he was following suddenly stagger and fall heavily to the ground. The detective started to see what was the matter, but before he could reach the fallen man a crowd had gathered, and some of the bystanders hurried after a conveyance.

Joe was about to press into the crowd, when some one seized him firmly by the neck and yelled:

"Help! Police!"

The crowd turned from the man on the sidewalk to the person uttering the cries, and saw a slim young fellow, bearing in his hand a drummer's sample-case, struggling in the grip of a rough, powerful-looking man, who was holding him with both hands and shouting for the police force at the top of his voice.

Joe, surprised and alarmed at the sudden onslaught, turned his head and saw that he was in the grasp of no less a personage than Jack Darkin, of Silverside.

Before he could utter a protest against the rough usage, a uniformed officer took him in charge, and, followed by Darkin, led him to a station-house, while an ambulance took Dunning in an opposite direction to the nearest hospital.

The detective was naturally very angry at being thus forced to abandon the chase just as he had caught sight of his game, but his protestations were of no avail, and he was conducted before a police sergeant, where Darkin entered a plea of highway robbery against him, and he was sent to a prison cell to spend the night.

CHAPTER XII.

"FOUR YEARS AT HARD LABOR."

Joe was not only exceedingly angry over his arrest, but not a little frightened as well. He knew at once the meaning of Darkin's assault, and marveled greatly at the man's audacity in trying to convict him of the theft of property which he himself had stolen only a few hours before.

He tried to reason with the police sergeant, but that officer was not to be "monkeyed with," as he expressed it, and the detective was placed in a cell until the next morning, when an examination of his case would be held. He was informed, however, that Darkin had offered a reward for his arrest and conviction, or the recovery of the stolen bonds, and that his description tallied exactly with that of the thief as furnished by Darkin himself and several passengers on the train who had witnessed the theft.

"I'm in a pretty bad fix," thought Joe, ruefully, when he was left alone in his narrow cell. "The tables have been turned on me with a vengeance. I wonder what was the matter with Dunning when he fell down, and if Darkin knows he is in the city! If he does, he probably won't care, as he thinks I've got the bonds and money, and will be forced to give them back or go to jail. I cannot safely tell the whole story, for if I do, it will leak out that I am close on Dunning's heels, and he will have time to escape. Anyway, I might not be believed, for the evidence is all against me, and I have absolutely no friends in the city. Was ever a man placed in a worse predicament?"

Joe paced up and down his cell in true criminal style until nearly midnight, but could think of no way of getting out of the scrape except by taking advantage of a means always at hand, and attempt forcible escape from the prison.

And the more he thought of this, the more

feasible it looked, and he determined to try it as soon as possible. Once free, he thought he could soon clear himself and at the same time fasten the crime where it belonged.

"It seems now as if everything and every one was against me. That terrible affair last night is just the beginning, I suppose, of a series of misfortunes which in the end may result in Dunning's escape. There is nothing now to prevent his getting out of town, unless he is seriously ill, and I hardly believe that. I do wish I could see Kid Keen for just a moment. I could tell him something that would settle the whole business. But I can't, and I suppose I'd better go to sleep, so as to feel all right in the morning."

The bed was hard and uncomfortable, and the covering very scanty, but Joe managed to pass at least half of the night in slumber, and was ready the next morning to take his place in the small line of prisoners who were preparing to march before the tribunal of justice, represented in this instance by a short, stout, red-faced man with sandy complexion and a Teutonic accent.

When the detective's case was called, he was confronted by such overwhelming evidence that the justice speedily decided to hold him in heavy bail to appear before the grand jury, which met in the afternoon.

Three passengers on the train testified to the commitment of the robbery, and all positively identified Joe as the thief. This being, to the mind of the judge, sufficient testimony, he refused a further hearing, and said, as impressively as his unimpressive physiognomy would admit:

"I shall holdt dis young man in fife thousand tollars pail to appear before the grandt chury dis afternoon, and tesire to vharh him now dot his name vill pe Tennis uf t'ese same vitnusses testify es t'ey hev here, shust now."

These eloquent remarks closed the examination, and the detective was led back to his cell.

He had not the five thousand dollars to furnish as guaranty for his appearance in the afternoon, and had he possessed that sum it is doubtful if he would have trusted it in the hands of his jailers.

In the afternoon he was conducted before the grand jury of the county, and his trial held according to due process of Colorado law. He pleaded guilty to the charge, but offered extenuating circumstances, which he would be pleased to offer to the jury or the judge in private. This was indignantly refused, and Joe received his sentence, conferred after a long lecture on the depravity of young men from the East. Inasmuch as he refused to tell what he had done with the money, and was several times severely reprimanded for contempt of court in not answering the jury's questions, the judge said he considered that he was redeeming the honor of outraged justice by sentencing the prisoner to four years at hard labor in the State Prison.

Joe received the verdict with equanimity, still hoping to escape from his persecutors before he was finally "jugged." But during the remainder of the day and the succeeding night no opportunity of escape presented itself, and he became well-nigh frantic over his forced inactivity.

Quite early the next morning he was taken from his cell and transferred to a small omnibus waiting at the door. This vehicle is known as the "Black Maria" in New York City, and is used for conveying prisoners from temporary to permanent imprisonment.

Joe was hustled inside with a half-dozen other unfortunates, and the door behind him securely locked and bolted. They drove to the railway station and were there placed in a baggage-car that had been side-tracked, evidently for that purpose.

The detective was earnestly hoping that some opportunity for escape would present itself before the train started, and this time he was enabled to make the attempt. The four guards who were to accompany them to their destination were provided with handcuffs, to be used in case of necessity, but evidently relied more on their pistols to subdue any insurrection that might arise.

All this Joe noted carefully, and finally got in conversation with one of the guards stationed near the side door. The car was arranged like all baggage-cars, a door in each of the four sides. On the right and left they work on slides, and on the two ends on hinges. The side doors were arranged for the accommodation of baggage at the stopping-places on the road, and were not reached by steps from the ground as were the others.

The detective chatted with the guard for some time, finding out thereby that the train might leave at almost any minute. It was waiting for an Accommodation Express which passed at any hour in the forenoon. The other prisoners were either asleep or lying down, and the guards were talking among themselves near by.

This was Joe's opportunity, and he was quick to take advantage of it. He swung the sliding door open with one shove of his powerful right hand, and the next instant had disappeared through the opening.

The other prisoners, aroused by their companion's flight, leaped to their feet and made a break for the opening. All four of the guards sprung upon them, hurling them backward with one hand and drawing their revolvers with the other.

"Stand back!" yelled one of them, showing his pistol in the face of the small but determined mob. "I'll shoot the first one who comes any nearer!"

But the crowd, maddened by Joe's escape, dashed toward him. The other three officers sprung on the backs of the prisoners and tried to force them further into the car, but seeing they were outnumbered, used their revolvers.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

"Stand back, or I'll shoot again. Stand—"

Crack! Crack!

Two of the convicts fell to the floor of the car, and their companions weakened at once, cowering back to their former positions.

To the attempt of the other prisoners at following his example, Joe undoubtedly owed his escape. It gave him time to put a goodly distance between himself and the baggage-car before the guards could give the alarm.

When they did so, their former prisoner was safely ensconced in his room at the Kirby House, busily engaged in changing his attire. The only remaining disguise which he was able to assume was that of a United States soldier, and having the complete uniform with him, he was soon able to again appear in safety on the streets of Junita.

This guise was perhaps the best he could have assumed under the circumstances, for in the hundreds of similar characters in and about Junita he was sure not to attract attention.

He congratulated himself a great deal on his lucky escape, and at once set out on another search for Dunning and the sachel. He purchased a copy of a daily paper, and found, in the local news column, the following paragraph:

"Samuel T. Warren, the gentleman who was stricken with paralysis of the heart while walking along Knox street last evening, died this morning in Carthage Hospital. . . . Some little suspicion attaches to his peculiar actions while in the hospital. He gave his name as Warren and said he came from Tucson, Arizona, but a telegram sent by me to that place yesterday elicited a reply that no one by that name was known there. Several letters on his person were directed to 'Mr. John A. Dunning' at Denver, and it is thought possible that he may have given the hospital authorities an assumed name. No one has as yet claimed the body, which was taken at once to the morgue."

The detective read the notice and then started at once for Carthage Hospital. He cared but little for the disposition of the body, but knew that, unless he took prompt action in the matter, the sachel might escape him forever. He feared that Darkin might also see the death of Dunning announced in the paper, and out of curiosity find out where the man boarded, and whether or not he had any property that might be worth confiscating.

At the hospital, the physician who had attended Dunning in his illness appeared strangely ill at ease under the detective's questions. He said his patient had left no property of any kind at the hospital, and that there was not a cent of money in his pockets when brought there.

This Joe readily believed, thinking of the incident at the faro-table, but beyond this the physician would say nothing, and was evidently much relieved when Joe took his departure.

He inquired the way to the morgue, but, before reaching there, circumstances made his visit unnecessary. In turning a corner he came upon a crowd of persons surrounding two very much excited men in the middle of the sidewalk. One of them the detective instantly recognized as Jack Darkin, and as he moved forward to see who the other was, he received a

shock from which he recovered with difficulty as he recognized the familiar face and form of John Dunning!

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

JOE had not doubted in the slightest degree but that Dunning had really died. The detective had seen him fall, and when he read the very plausible account of his death in the paper he did not dream of such a thing as meeting the man face to face in the street, alive and well.

But such was indeed the case, and he stared at Dunning, hardly able to believe the evidence of his own eyes. The man was having a very wordy dispute with Darkin, and would evidently have struck him, had not the crowd interfered.

"Call an officer," said Dunning, and as he did so Joe caught a glimpse of the black sachel in his hand. "This man is a thief!"

"You're a liar!" retorted Darkin, wrathfully. "Thet sachel an' what's in it belong to me, an' I want it mighty quick. I bought it, an' yo' ain't got no right to it!"

"I haven't, eh? Well, perhaps not, but I can prove, just the same, that you stole the thousand dollars in gold from my room in Silver-side. It's in this sachel now, with the other papers, and although I can't imagine how it got there, I know the whole thing is mine, and I shall keep it."

"Well, I reckon not. You kin hev ther gold, but yo' ain't got no right to ther papers in ther sachel. 'Them's mine, 'cause I paid fur 'em."

"Darkin, you had better keep quiet or I'll have you arrested at once," said Dunning. "I don't want to go to the trouble now since I have got all the money back, but I shall do so, unless you clear out."

"But them papers is mine."

"They are not."

"Yo' lie. Don't I tell you I bought 'em an' paid fur 'em?"

"But the person you bought them of stole them from me."

"No, he didn't, neither. They wuz mine day before yist'day an' wuz stole from me ez I wuz ridin' on ther cars to Denver."

"Who stole them?"

"A young chap, an' he wuz sent up for it, too. I hed 'im arrested yisterday an' he got four years in jail. I tell yo' I can prove they wuz mine!"

"Well, it doesn't make any difference whether you had them at one time or not. They are mine now and have always been mine and I intend to keep them. See what a crowd is gathering here—I'm going to leave this town on the first train."

"No, yo' ain't, not till I git them papers. Yo' kin hev ther money but them papers is mine. I know what they'r' wuth, an' I'll hev 'em or arrest yo' fur stealin' 'em. I kin prove by fifty people thet I had thet sachel."

Dunning walked off, followed by Darkin who talked and gesticulated wildly.

Joe kept close upon their heels, occasionally hearing a few sentences of the excited conversation which ensued. Both threatened to arrest the other and yet both feared to take the step except as a last extremity.

As the two walked along together, the dispute getting hotter and hotter every moment and finally threatening to come to blows, Joe saw in a hand-to-hand conflict a possible opportunity of securing the sachel once more.

And this was for the present his highest ambition. If he could secure that and then watch Dunning until assistance came from the East, he had no doubt but that the evidence would convict him of the robbery, if not the murder, of Joseph Schlerger.

But his hopes of witnessing a passage at arms between the two men were disappointed. They stopped in front of a hotel somewhat smaller than the Kirby House, and Dunning, followed closely by his companion, entered and went up-stairs, evidently, to his room.

Joe could not follow him very well without attracting attention, so he turned to the clerk at the desk and asked:

"Who was the man that just went up-stairs?"

"Which one?"

"The first."

"His name is Matthews; he is stopping here for a day or two."

"Do you know when he is going away, or where?"

"No."

"Is any one with him?"

"Not that I know of."

"All right, thanks," and Joe took a seat in

the reading-room to wait until Dunning came down-stairs. He was obliged to sit there for nearly an hour before the man appeared, this time alone, but with the sachel still held in his right hand. He walked to the desk, paid the clerk some money, and then hurriedly went out into the street and started for the railway station.

Joe had left all his baggage in his room at the Kirby House, but he could not afford to lose sight of Dunning now, and when the latter entered a train bound for Denver, he purchased a ticket for the same place.

It was a long and wearisome ride to Denver, and the detective was glad to be able to stretch his legs as he followed Dunning about the regular, well-kept streets of that model Western city. The man seemed to have no definite object in view, and wandered through the public buildings and parks of the place before going to the Weldon Hotel and registering. Joe kept close at his heels and placed the name of "James S. McCarty" under that of "C. M. Matthews" on the clerk's book. He was assigned to a room directly opposite Dunning's, and when the latter went to his room to prepare for dinner, the detective followed his example.

"I sha'n't let the fellow out of my sight," he thought, as he washed the dust of travel from his face and hands. "Just as soon as I get a chance I shall steal those bonds, though it's pretty risky business. Then I'll keep my eye on him until some of the other men come out here with a warrant for his arrest."

Joe dined at the same table with the man he was so persistently following, and in the evening accompanied him to the theater. At night, after Dunning had retired, the detective sought out a clothing store and purchased another outfit, to be used in case his present disguise should attract suspicion. He also obtained a pair of side-whiskers, which changed his appearance to a great extent.

Thus equipped he returned to the hotel, which he found in a state of great excitement. Dunning, who seemed to have a remarkable aptitude for getting into trouble of some kind at every step, had just informed the proprietor in tragic tones that he had been robbed.

"When I came down to dinner I left a sachel containing seventy-five thousand dollars in my room up-stairs. I went to the theater from the table, and on returning I find that it has been taken."

The proprietor of the hotel hastened to assure the angry and frightened man that thorough search for his property would be instituted without delay.

The detective, as much alarmed as Dunning, hastened to his room.

CHAPTER XIV.

KID KEEN TAKES A HAND.

KEEN followed the detective's example, and in starting out on Dunning's trail, first interviewed the new proprietor of the "White-house." Casey told him practically the same story that he had told German Joe only a few hours before, and the scout set out for Junita, almost in the tracks of his partner. During the remainder of that day, and throughout the next, he was unable to discover any trace of the missing man.

He was stopping in the Valencia House, and on the third day he discovered, much to his astonishment and delight, that Dunning was staying at the same hotel. He saw him, quite early in the day, enter the room next to his own. The man carried the sachel in his hand, and was conversing in loud and excited tones with his companion, whom Keen soon recognized as Jack Darkin.

On entering the room, which was connected by a glass door, the panes of which had been heavily painted, with Kid Keen's, Dunning breathed a sigh of relief, and turned to his companion.

"Now, what do you want here? Didn't I tell you that I shall place you under arrest unless you cease to annoy me? You must be crazy, to act in this way. I wish you would go away—I have no time to bother with you further."

"Yo' ain't, eh? Well, I reckon yo' will bother with me consider'ble further, 'less'n yo' giv' me that sachel an' ther papers."

"But, you idiot, they are mine!"

"No, they ain't, neither."

Dunning turned away with an expression of disgust, and after carefully locking the sachel in a bureau-drawer, pocketed the key, and began to make preparations for his departure.

"You are either a fool or else one of the meanest men in the world," he exclaimed. "Why don't you go back to Silverside and behave yourself, instead of bothering around here with your nonsense? I'm totally sick of it all, and won't hear any more of it. The money is mine, whether you ever had it or not, and I shall keep it. Now, clear out; I want to dress."

Darkin was working himself into a terrible rage. He believed that he had been robbed of the bonds, and really thought that Dunning was a party to the theft. He listened to the man in silence, but his eyes glistened ominously and he gritted his teeth—sure signs of anger in a man of his caliber.

Meanwhile, Keen was able to hear all that was going on in the next room, and see part of it, for the paint had chipped off the glass in several places, and he could see through. He congratulated himself on finding Dunning, and wondered where German Joe had concealed himself. Had he known that at the time the detective was in the reading-room, down-stairs, he would probably have looked for a speedy and satisfactory settlement of the case.

"I don't want to raise a disturbance here," said Dunning. "But unless you get out, I shall call for a policeman."

"I wish ye would. It'll save me ther trouble."

"And are you still convinced that you have any right to these papers—or to part of them?"

"They'r' all mine, an' I want 'em. Hand 'em over an' I'll git out. The money is yourn, an' yo' kin keep it fur all I keer, but I want them bonds."

Dunning saw clearly that there was trouble ahead, and he took a unique and effective way of avoiding it. He had in his pocket a pair of handcuffs, and taking them out, he approached Darkin, while that gentleman was gazing out of the window. His hands were crossed behind him, and it was the work of but an instant to slip the steel clasps over his wrists and draw them together tight. Darkin uttered a yell and wheeled about, struggling to release his hands.

"What er yo' doin'?" he howled, tearing about the room and swearing between every word. "Leggo my hands or I'll put a bullet in ye—leggo, I say!"

Dunning looked at him apprehensively for a moment, but saw that it would be impossible for the man to draw his revolver while his hands were in their present position.

"I warned you to clear out," he said, skipping about the room to avoid the flying legs of the maddened man. "You wouldn't do it, and so I was obliged to handcuff you to keep you from hurting yourself or me."

Darkin didn't venture a reply. He was indulging in a fit of swearing that almost choked him, and he whirled about like a jumping-jack, trying his best to free his hands.

"You had better quiet down," advised Dunning, from his position behind the bed, which he had shoved out into the middle of the floor and constantly kept between himself and his antagonist. "It will do you no good to dance around in that style. Why don't you behave yourself?"

Darkin stopped and leaned against the bedstead, panting loudly, but still employing every other breath in an expression of profanity.

"Yo' blanked fool!" he roared, making another feint of rushing on Dunning. "What'n thunder do yo' mean by fixin' me like this? Ef yo' don't leggo my hands, I'll paralyze yo' when I do git loose."

"I shall release you presently," returned Dunning, cheerfully. "But first let us see what arrangements we can make about those bonds. Do you still entertain the idea that they are yours?"

Darkin replied most emphatically that he did. His spirit had in no wise been broken by the rough treatment, although his arms showed signs of approaching dissolution.

"Ef you think I kin be bluffed by this little game uv yo's, it's time you learnt what'r mistake yo'r makin'. I ain't no chicken, an' I reckon thet when I git out'n these things, I'll make yo' feel pooty bad. I'd giv' them papers, the hull lot uv 'em, ef my hands wuz loose. I'd maul yo' till yo'r own maw wouldn't know yer."

These disjointed sentences did not seem to disturb Dunning in the least. He had perfect faith in the effects of the handcuffs, and again began his preparations for leaving the hotel.

"I shall have to go to Denver to-day," he said,

taking the sachel from the bureau-drawer. "I guess I'll leave you here now, and tell the clerk down stairs that you want to be called at six o'clock this afternoon. I'll give him the key to the handcuffs, and maybe he'll release you."

Darkin shut his teeth hard, and did not trust himself to reply. But it is safe to bet that, had his hands been free at the time, John Dunning would never have left the room alive.

Keen followed the man with the sachel down stairs, and out in the street to the railway station. He rode to Denver in the car with German Joe, but did not recognize the detective in the disguise of an army officer.

In Denver Keen lost track of Dunning almost as soon as he left the train. He sought to find him in the crowded depot, but failed; and then went to the Weldon House and engaged a room for the night. He was much disappointed in losing scent of the man, but thought it very probable that he would be able to find him in the evening at some place of amusement.

He went to his room to change his buckskin garments for a more civilized garb, and when he reappeared he was dressed in a conventional suit of black, which showed off his admirable proportions to advantage. On his way down stairs he passed a room, the door of which stood partly open, and glancing in, the scout saw on the bed the cause of so much anxiety and trouble—the little black sachel.

He knew at once the reason of its presence there, and noting the number and locality of the room, went down stairs to dinner. He saw Dunning there soon after, and just as that gentleman began his meal, Keen hastened upstairs to see if it was possible to secure possession of the sachel and its contents. The door was locked, but the lithe scout managed to squeeze his form through the transom above it and drop into the room.

He secured the sachel and returned the way he had entered, although in doing so he came very near squeezing the breath out of his body.

"Whew!" he panted, when once more in his room. "That wuz a mighty clus'shove. I'm just erbout four sizes too big to go through that winder, an' I've scraped ther buttons all off my coat in doin' it. But I've got ther boodle jest the same, an' this time I reckon I'll keep it till its right owners git it. I wish I could see ther Dutchman."

Keen returned to the dining-room, and when he saw Dunning go out into the street without visiting his room, he knew he would be sure to return, and therefore did not follow him to the theater, as did his partner.

He loitered about in the corridor for some time, and then, after taking a short walk out of doors, went up stairs and retired. He was very well satisfied with his success, and thought how surprised Joe would be when he presented him with the sachel. The events of the day were passing through his mind, and he was laughing to himself over Darkin's adventure, when he heard an uproar down stairs and at once divined the cause of it.

"Dunning's discovered that his sachel's gone," he muttered to himself, pleased to think how surprised and angry the man would feel over his loss. "I reckon I'll go down and see the circus."

He dressed as quickly as he could, and went down stairs, as nonchalantly as if he had not been the cause of all the disturbance.

The proprietor of the hotel was endeavoring in vain to pacify the unruly guest.

"Search every room in the house," cried Dunning, pacing back and forth in the corridor. "Have some one watch the entrance here, and see that no man takes the sachel away from the hotel!"

"Yes, yes," said the landlord, nervously, anxious to promise anything that would quiet the excited man. "We'll recover your money if it's in the building."

The employees of the hotel were sent scampering away to all parts of the building in search of the missing money, while the clerk himself undertook to acquaint the police with the crime.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTURE AND ESCAPE.

THE detective could not imagine who had stolen the sachel, and was at first inclined to believe that the story was a piece of fiction gotten up by Dunning to throw his pursuers off his track. But the man's earnestness in demanding an immediate and thorough inves-

tigation convinced Joe at length of his sincerity.

"I don't see who could have stolen it," he said to himself, standing in the doorway of his own room, and watching the search which was going on in the room opposite. "No one here knew of the bonds, and I doubt if any of the hotel servants would commit the theft."

In Dunning's room a dozen persons were congregated, busily engaged in searching every nook and corner of the apartment for the missing sachel.

While they were thus engaged, Dunning himself came up stairs, inquiring of the proprietor, who accompanied him, whether or not any of the servants would be likely to have seen a man if he had entered the room during the evening.

"I think so; some one is usually about the halls. Calkins has charge of this floor, and if you'll excuse me for a moment, I will call him."

He returned almost immediately, accompanied by a much-frightened youngster in a blue uniform and brass buttons.

"Calkins, did you see any one around this door during the afternoon, either going in or out?"

"Yes, sir. Him!" and he pointed to Dunning.

"Any one else?"

"I didn't see no one else go in or out, but this man 'ere was peekin' through the keyhole just about dinner-time."

The boy nodded toward the detective, who remembered his foolish action, and felt like kicking himself and his accuser down stairs together.

"What! this man!" asked Dunning, pointing toward Joe. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective, who had been unnoticed before, now became the center of attraction. The proprietor of the hotel looked at him in undisguised astonishment.

"You don't look like a thief," he said frankly.

"That makes no difference!" exclaimed Dunning, roughly.

"Is it true, sir, that you were looking through the keyhole of this door?"

"Yes, sir," answered Joe, determined to bring matters to a climax as soon as possible.

"What for?"

"I wished to see whether or not you were on the inside."

"And for what purpose?"

"I was looking for the bonds and money you stole from Mr. Schlerger in New York City a few weeks ago."

Dunning staggered back a couple of paces, turned very pale, and exclaimed:

"What!"

"My name is Winthrop, and I am here to arrest you—By the great Eternal, here's Keen!"

The scout pushed his way through the crowd to his partner's side, and whispered in his ear:

"I've got the sachel locked up in my room. I took it from his room jest a little while ago."

If the detective had had confidence in his ability to bluff Dunning before, it was redoubled now, knowing that the sachel was in their possession.

He stepped forward and laid his hand on Dunning's shoulder. The man shrunk from him, asking huskily:

"Where's your warrant?"

Joe showed him the badge of a Government detective, and Keen carelessly brought into view a large revolver, at the sight of which the crowd in line with its barrel drew apart.

Dunning's courage was broken, and he readily followed the detective—shall I say the two detectives?—into Joe's room. Mr. Weldon, the proprietor of the hotel, also entered, and while Keen stood guard over their prisoner, Joe told him of the crime for which the arrest was made.

"We may need you for a witness to the fact that the money and bonds were found in his possession," he concluded. "But I think the evidence which we can furnish will be more than enough to convict the man of robbery, beyond that."

Joe paused, and a kind of shiver ran over the prisoner.

"We'll keep him with us to-night. In the morning I think some men will come here from New York with a warrant and the extradition papers."

Mr. Weldon walked out of the room, and the two partners were left alone with their prisoner.

"I wish we hed them handcuffs yo' put on Jack Darkin this mornin'," said Keen, amiably. "I reckon yo'd raise about ez much uv a rumpus ez he did, eh?"

Dunning did not reply. His face was buried in his hands and he was thinking deeply.

His sudden capture and the loss of the money, just when he seemed to have cleared himself of all obstacles, made him desperate. He realized that he was in the power of earnest and determined men; but to him life within prison walls would not be worth the living, and, survive or perish, he resolved to make a vigorous attempt at escape some time during the night.

"I guess I'll bring my riggin's down hyer," said Keen. "This room is large enough fur all uv us, an' I don't feel like leavin' yo' alone. Yo' keep yo'r eye on ther rascal till I cum back."

He returned soon after, bearing in one hand a package of clothing, and in the other the never-to-be-forgotten sachel.

"Hyers ther 'tarnal thing," he exclaimed, flinging the latter at the detective's feet. "I don't want ther darned stuff. It's caused more trouble than it's wuth, I'll bet."

The prisoner evidently thought so, too, but he kept his mouth shut, only speaking once and then to ask where he was to sleep.

His submissiveness aroused Joe's suspicion, and he resolved to keep a close watch upon him during the night.

The guard was divided between them, each serving two hours at a time. At midnight Keen relieved his partner, who at once threw himself upon a couch which had been made on the floor—the bed being occupied by their prisoner. He took a seat near the door, rested his revolver across his knees and was soon buried in thought. He was wondering whether or not it would be best to abandon the lazy life he had been leading and accompany his partner to the East. He had nearly reached a decision in the mental debate in favor of the affirmative side of the question, when he heard a stealthy footstep across the floor. He looked up, just in time to see Dunning swing his heavy rifle about his head for the last time, and then he sunk all in a heap to the floor, a whole galaxy of stars dancing before his eyes.

It was an hour before he regained consciousness, and staggered toward the sleeping detective, with the blood still trickling slowly down from a terrible cut in his head.

He scarcely knew what he was doing, but in some way managed to awaken his partner and then sunk into unconsciousness upon the bed. Joe, terribly alarmed, sprang up, seizing his revolver from his side and leaped to the floor.

One glance about the room showed him what had occurred. He first alarmed the house by pressing the electric bell connecting with the burglar-alarm in the office down stairs and with the police-station on the next block.

Then he carefully washed the blood from Keen's face and arranged him as comfortably as possible on the bed until a physician could be called.

The sachel and its contents had been placed under the pillow of the couch on which Joe was sleeping, and that had not been removed. This the detective discovered at once, and when Mr. Weldon, only half-dressed, rushed into the room, followed by a dozen scantily-clad forms, he informed them that Keen had been knocked down by Dunning and that the latter had escaped.

The scout was badly injured, and Joe dispatched one of the hotel servants to the nearest doctor's, while he again rung up the police-alarm, this time bringing to the room thereby a couple of sleepy-looking officials, who listened to the detective's story in silence and promised to inaugurate at once a search for the missing man.

"Did he take the money with him?" asked Mr. Weldon, to whom the events of the night would long furnish material for reflection.

"No," replied Joe, assisting the physician, who had just arrived, in undressing the inanimate form of his partner. "He did not have time to take that. He was glad enough, I guess, to get off himself."

"If you desire, I will put the sachel in my safe," said the proprietor. "It will be secure there."

"I wish you would," replied the detective. "It's over there under the pillow. Keep it safe until I ask for it, will you?"

Mr. Weldon promised to do so, and carried the sachel down stairs, where he placed it in the furthest corner of his safe and locked the door.

Joe meanwhile had paid no attention to their prisoner's escape and was exercised only in see-

ing his partner's return to consciousness again. They had bandaged up his head while the physician hastened back to his office after the necessary materials for sewing up the wound. When he returned and performed this delicate operation it was nearly daylight, and as yet, Joe had received no word from the police. He did not think Dunning would be able to escape when he had been so prompt in giving the alarm, but such certainly seemed to be the case, and leaving his partner's bedside, the detective started out in search of their late prisoner.

Joe spent the day in searching over the city for the missing man, but by nightfall was obliged to return to the hotel without having discovered any traces of him. The detective had prepared himself for disguises of all sorts, but his search was in vain, and he soon reached the conclusion that Dunning was either in hiding in the city or had left it early in the day.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEATH OF DUNNING.

WE must now return for a short time to the man whom Dunning left handcuffed and raving in his room at the Valencia Hotel in Junita. Darkin was not a man to let such an insult go unavenged, and when, late in the afternoon, he was released by the hotel-clerk, he went straight to the railroad station.

The ticket-agent there told him that a man such as he described had purchased passage on a train to Denver early in the day.

"Gimme a ticket!" said Darkin, savagely, throwing a gold coin upon the small counter in front of the agent's window. "When does ther next train leave?"

"Seven o'clock."

"An' what time does it git ter Denver?"

"About twelve o'clock."

And so, just when Dunning was arrested for the theft of the sachel, Darkin, angry and revengeful, left the train at the Denver station and inquired his way to the nearest hotel.

He was not only imbittered against Dunning for his treatment of him during the day, but felt that the latter had robbed him of his bonds, which he was now convinced were worth a good deal of money. He had come to Denver to get the sachel back at any cost, and at the same time to make his enemy suffer for the humiliation he had endured.

"I low I'm a gentleman ef I did take that gold uv his'n," he muttered to himself as he strode along the brilliantly-lighted streets. "An' bein' sech, I don't intend to hev no son-of-a-gun like him treat me in this way. Them papers is mine, an' more'n likely he knows it. I kin prove that I hed 'em, an' that they wuz stole from me. Ef no ways else, I reckon that young feller who took 'em would be willin' to cum out'n jail fur tellin' who he giv' 'em to. But, what riles me most is ther way he talks ter me—jest ez ef ther papers wuz his'n an' I wuz tryin' ter bunco him out'n them. Jest wait till I lay my paws on ther sucker!"

Darkin spent much of the night in pondering over the wrongs he had received at Dunning's hands, and when morning dawned his appearance had improved considerably by a bath and a shave, but his temper still simmered hot.

He arose in the early morning and took a walk about the city, enjoying the fresh, cool air of Colorado's healthful climate, but still ruminating over his many grievances and cursing the day that had brought Dunning to Silver-side.

He strolled about the city during the day, examining every passer-by in hopes of seeing the object of his search, but by nightfall returned to his hotel without having done so. Delay and disappointment did not lessen his fiery anger against the man who had wronged him, and in the evening he set out again upon his quest.

It was nearly midnight, when, happening to enter a gambling-house in a retired part of the city, he heard a familiar voice address the proprietor of the place, who stood guard near the door.

"Don, I lost five thousand dollars here about a month ago; do you remember it?"

"Yes; I recall your face, and recollect that you did play high occasionally. Why?"

"Nothing, except that I am dead-broke. I haven't a cent to get a square meal with, and I want to leave town. If you could let me have a V, I'll—"

"Why, old man, of course I will. You oughtn't to play the bank if you haven't got the stamps."

Don reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a wallet bulging with greenbacks, as the other replied:

"I did have the stamps then—they're gone now."

"Well, I'm very sorry, and hope this will help you. If it don't, let me know of it, and I will try to get you a job. My brother is running a newspaper here, and he may want a man. Good-by. Don't put that money on a faro-table, and it may get you out of the hole."

"I sha'n't, Don, and if I ever get on my feet again, I'll return it. It's a small sum, I know, but it is enough to— Why, Don, it's a hundred-dollar bill!"

But Don had disappeared up the narrow stairway, and the man turned away with the bill in his hand and words that came near to being a blessing trembling on his lips.

He turned about and walked into the almost deserted street, shrinking back in alarm when he felt a hand laid heavily on his shoulder.

"Dunning!"

"Darkin!"

The two stared into each other's eyes, the one trembling in the angry and determined grasp of the other.

"How did you happen to leave Junita?" asked Dunning, trying to keep his voice steady. "Why didn't you go back to Silverside?"

"Because I wanted yo—an' them papers. Whar' be they?"

"They were stolen!"

"From you?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night in the Weldon House."

"I don't believe it. Yo'r' lyin' so's to git rid uv me. But yo' won't—I'm a-goin' to hev them papers an' then I'll settle my leetle grudge with you."

"But I tell you they were stolen."

"Then cum with me to this Weldon House an' prove it."

"I can't," gasped Dunning. "I wouldn't dare go there."

"I thought yo' wuzn't tellin' ther truth. Now I want them papers, an' no more foolin' about it."

"I hav'n't got— Put up that pistol or some one will see you!"

"I won't do it. Ef yo' don't tell me whar the sachel is, I'm a-goin' to shoot yo' right hyer an' now."

The angry, earnest tones of the man rung faintly in Dunning's ears, a kind of numbness and weakness stole over him and he staggered against the side of the building.

"Don't," he murmured faintly. "I've got another one—of those attacks—call some one!"

Darkin looked at him watchfully.

"None uv yer foolin'. I ain't a-goin' to stand no nonsense hyer jest—hol' on, stan' up!"

Dunning sunk down to the sidewalk with a low sigh, blood issuing from between his white, closed lips.

Darkin gazed at him in astonishment and then rushed into a saloon near by to summon help. When he returned, he found a man bending over the almost unconscious form of his late adversary, and trying to get him to speak.

In spite of the partial disguise, Darkin recognized the new-comer as German Joe and then sneaked off in the darkness, which, as it hid him from the detective's view, takes him from our further attention. (It may be said, however, that, after much argument, Casey accepted his return to partnership in the "Whitehouse," retaining for himself, however, the right to taunt him occasionally for his lack of wisdom in ever leaving such a paying concern.)

Dunning was dying!

It did not take Joe long to discover this fact after he had come across the body in one of Denver's most deserted streets. The detective folded his coat and laid it under the man's head just as several persons came from the saloon in response to Darkin's alarm.

"Dunning," said Joe, "can you hear me?"

"Yes," very huskily answered the dying man.

"Did you take the money from Schlerger?"

"Yes."

"And kill him?"

"Yes," still more faintly. "God rest my—"

He was dead!

The detective assisted the bystanders in removing the body to the saloon, from which place it was presently taken to the nearest undertaker's, at Joe's request.

Then the detective returned to the Weldon House, and finding his partner resting comfortably, and able to bear the shock, Joe told him the story of Dunning's death.

"Poor fool," said Keen. "He might better

'a' stayed hyer. Mebbe he wouldn't 'a' died then."

"Perhaps not," answered Joe, a little absently. "I reckon we've finished this case now. How long before you will be able to go East?"

"Me—go East?"

"Certainly."

"What fur?"

"You are going to go in partnership with me, are you not? We work very well together in this business, and I know Byrnes will give you an appointment to his staff when he hears what you have done out here."

"Yo' think so?"

"I know it."

"Wa-al, mebbe I'd better try it. I reckon it's better'n this no-account life out hyer. But when 'er yo' goin' ter New York?"

"Just as soon as you get so that you can travel."

"Yo' ain't a-goin' to wait fur me?"

"Of course."

"But thet money an' ther will; what'll yo' do with them? Hadn't they orter go to New York?"

"I'll send them back with the detectives I telegraphed for the other day. They will probably come in this afternoon."

"An' air' yo' goin' back to Placer Ranch? Yo'd orter go over ter see the boys, an' tell 'em how everything's turned out. Little Pete 'u'd be tickled to death."

"I was just thinking of it. I guess I'll make my report in writing now, and send it to New York with the sachel and will. That will finish up the case, and then I'll go over to Placer Ranch to spend the night. I'll be back to-morrow."

The detective did so, and late in the afternoon started for Placer Ranch. It was a long and tiresome journey, but he felt interested in the welfare of his friends in the little mining-town, and determined to see them once more before going East. He reached Little Pete's about daybreak, and found the inmates of the "Golden Garter" just getting up.

Little Pete himself had only just recovered from the wound he had received in the raid upon the "Badgers' Nest," and received the detective with open arms.

"Here's ther Dutchman!" he shouted, rushing from behind the bar to grasp the detective's hand. "We've been a-hearin' 'round hyer thet yo' wuz a detective a-chasin' thet man in Silverside fur murderin' some one out East, but we didn't 'low yo'd be back ag'in. Nick Goodloe's been a-tellin' us about you an' Keen, an' we buried Limpy Dick yist'day. Nick's reformed, I kin tell yo', an' jest as soon ez his arm gits in shape he's a-goin' to work. The gal has got back, lookin' jest as pretty as she did afore, and ther colonel's a-goin' ter start East to-day."

Little Pete rattled on, giving the detective all the news, and at the same time filling a score of glasses for the party of men now collected about the bar!

"Here yo' go!" he shouted, raising a bottle in the air. "Drink to the life an' health uv ther hayseed sport—thet wuz."

Joe smiled, and asked how Dacy was.

"He kin answer fur himself, I reckon," said that individual, whom the detective had not noticed in the crowd. "I'm well enough to lay out thet man who called me a thief. Whar did yo' leave 'im?"

Joe told the story of his search, of the man's capture, escape and final death, and of Kid Keen's injury. The crowd listened attentively, and each man crowded forward to shake his hand when he left the saloon.

"I'll go over and call on Colonel Denmore," he said at parting. "Good-by, boys!"

"Good-by, Dutchy!" they yelled, waving their hats over their heads as he galloped down the road.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

A FEW days later, a party of half a dozen persons were sitting together in the parlor car of a train flying eastward. Joe Winthrop stood leaning over the back of Grace Denmore's chair, pointing out of the window at some bits of pretty scenery, but more frequently glancing down at the beautiful face of the young girl, still pale and wan from the effects of her terrible experience in Silverside.

Kid Keen reclined, at full length, upon a cushioned couch, near by, occasionally taking part in the general conversation. He had just offered to play a game of penny-ante with the porter of the car, who had confided to the scout his ability to play that fascinating game. But in the absence of a pack of cards this was im-

possible and Keen heartily wished that their journey was over.

Colonel Denmore and his wife were with the party, the latter looking happy and well, and the former dividing his time between quarreling with the conductor and arguing politics—on which subject he was exceedingly rusty—with a little man who sat near him.

The train reached Buffalo about eight o'clock in the morning, and the travelers took another at once for New York City, reaching the latter place in the evening.

Colonel Denmore and his family took a carriage to their residence in the upper part of the city and the two partners started downtown.

Joe led the way to Chief Byrnes's private office in Police Headquarters, and was at once admitted. He made his report, delivered the satchel and the will, and was about to retire, to await another assignment, when Byrnes said:

"Winthrop, you have done very well, and deserve the gift which it is my pleasure to bestow. But first, let me do as you have requested."

The chief made out a formal certificate of appointment to Kid Keen as detective on his staff, and handed the scout a silver badge.

"Your duties will commence at once, he said. 'I shall always try to let you two work together. You make a good team. But before you go, allow me to present you with this.'"

He held toward them the satchel which had caused them so much trouble and danger.

"Mrs. Schlerger told me when I showed her your telegram, saying that both the will and the money had been recovered, that I should give you the money as a reward for your efforts. The will places at her disposal an amount of money many times the value of this. You've earned it; take the bundle and divide it between you."

Joe took the satchel and handed it to his partner.

"We are getting well paid—better, I think, than we deserve. There's a good deal of money there."

"I know it," answered the inspector turning to his desk, "but it's all yours. Do what's right with it and report for duty in the morning."

We did intend to end our story here but feel inclined to yield to the temptation to show to the reader, the home of the two partners about a month after their visit to Chief Byrnes's office. It is situated in a pleasant part of the city, but not in a part in which extravagant rents would soon eat up their little fortune.

It is presided over by a very pretty Mrs. Winthrop, who frequently says that her husband ought to have rescued her from her kidnappers in Silver-side, instead of leaving it to one of her father's friends in Placer Ranch. But while Joe admits that the fact does take away a little of the romance that might otherwise attach to their marriage, he insists that he is satisfied as it is and is heartily glad that the Placer Ranch man was given the opportunity.

And Keen—
"Wa-al, I'm kinder gittin' use ter this country but it don't touch a feather to Colorady. Ef it wuzn't fur Joe an' ther excitement I'm gittin' in off'n on, I reckon I thought git lonesome. Ez it is I'm kinder glad I cum."

THE END.

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